



Northside Residents Redevelopment Council

"Exploring, expanding, and exercising our Northside privilege"

Malaika: Tell me a little bit about you. So you were born and raised here?

Kenny Rance: I was born and raised in North Minneapolis, 1200 Russell. And I went to Loring over in Northeast, then I went to Penn, which was right up the street for second grade. Then I went to Lincoln, then I went to Breck for three hellish years. And then I went to North and I got into their Summatech program, even though I lived in the Henry district. But so many of my childhood friends from Homewood were going to North because they had gotten into Summatech. It was my understanding I had gotten in on the very last day and did not regret it at all. Graduated in '88, I got accepted early to Howard University. My alma mater, had a great time at Howard, met my wife there, thus this one and another, my daughter. Both of my sisters went to Howard University, my older sister met her husband there and then so it's... Then after that I came back here in 1992, stayed here for about a year. Worked out at Paisley Park, worked on some music videos for Prince and stuff. Which was kind of cool, but I'd always had an interest in working in the entertainment industry. I saw She's Gotta Have It when I was in high school and was like, I want to be a filmmaker. Even though prior to I had told myself that I wanted to be a brain surgeon because I knew they made a lot of money and I just got an instant reaction from people when I said that, so I said I'll run with that. It wasn't my cup of tea, so I moved on to Los Angeles and worked in a variety of different positions in entertainment and then I left Los Angeles in 2006. Moved to Charlotte and I was in Charlotte until 2013 and moved back here in 2013. And actually we moved back in with my mom for about a year and then now we live in...

Malaika: So tell me a little bit more about growing up here? What do you remember as your favorite parts of being a kid in the neighborhood?

Kenny Rance: The fact that I could just literally go outside and play, which is such a stark contrast from what I see for my children now. We would go outside and I was really forced to go outside sometimes. But you know, I had Tarik who was on Thomas and I had the Tyners who lived across the street, two houses down. And then Derek and Debbie who lived next to Tarik. And then, you know, Celine, who lived on Thomas who lived next to Mike Crenshaw. And then we had Farwell park and then we'd go to the park, which is like two blocks away. And we'd play kick ball or runners and riders or we'd just come up with things to do. Then we'd go down to Wirth Park and ride our bikes and play in the creek. And mess with golfers on the golf course or just, you know, find things to do back in the woods. Or get a raft and raft down the creek. Or one summer of my best friends Tarik, his dad bought him a set of boxing gloves. So we organized a boxing tournament and that was cut short after Doug knocked out Stan and we thought Stan was dead. And we would take crab apples from the neighbors' trees and we'd have these big huge crab apple fights. Or we'd go on our bikes and we'd ride down to 8th and Vincent and we'd mess with the 8th and Vincent kids and have little skirmishes and stuff. So there was always something to do and we just had a great spirit about it.

A People's History of the Homewood Neighborhood: Kenny Rance



Northside Residents Redevelopment Council

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Kenny Rance:

And we would be at each other's houses and it was definitely a community. We had mom's sweet shop and little candy store. Then the corner store we'd go to. And there was Kings and sometimes we'd get on our bikes and we'd ride down to the Terrace Theater which is now where HyVee is in Robinsdale, ride down there and catch a movie. So that was like a big event. And you know, then as we got older, we got into girls. We'd get on the 20 bus or the 19 or the 5 and go downtown to the City Center Mall and look at girls down at the food court. We'd go down to the arcade. We actually had to put quarters in Donkey Kong and Father Defender and play games. And then trying to meet girls and get a bite to eat and come back home on the bus. And then when high school came along and I went to North and so they had an excellent basketball program. So you know, it was going to the games and that was always exciting. And we were always kind of looking for, you know, things to do. Whether it was a party and whether it was in Northside or Southside or you know dare we'd venture over to St. Paul, or Harlem Center, or LBs, or Bernadette's, which was the YWCA over in Uptown. And then you know, we'd go over to the North Commons and sometimes they'd have a party and there'd be a fight or something. Or have a party at Kaufman Hall, but there'd be a fight or something and we'd kind of linger and you know. So we had to kind of be creative, but there were just so many people, you know, in the neighborhood and just your cast of characters. And I just don't see that for my children like was for me. And that's concerning.

Malaika:

What do you think it's different now?

Kenny Rance:

I think part of it is digital technology with iPads and game consoles. And I remember when the Atari 2600 came out. Now you're huddled around the TV and you're playing Asteroids and Space Invaders and now you've got Madden and Ghost Recon and Marvel video games. And I also think that home ownership - so when you take a look at Minnesota and it is ranked Number One for economic disparities. When you take a look at the amount of redlining that has taken place in the Twin Cities and the amount of just overt, systemic racism. You know I look at my neighborhood and I look at the number of young homeowners, it's very few. And for the ones that are, some of them have acquired their homes through, passed down through their family, but for people to buy into my community, I think that that has a big impact. And I live in Lynn Park, say what you want about Lynn Park, but I think that when you, you know back when I was growing up you had more of a thriving middle class and you know, you knew who your neighbors were and there was a greater sense of community. And now I think when you talk about the Near North, you talk about the amount of transient-ness that takes place over in North. A lot of renting. You have a lot of people in and out of the public school systems. Ninety percent of the children of color born in Hennepin County are to single parent families. So you know, you have less fathers. I think all of that has an impact on stability, both economic and emotional/spiritual development.

A People's History of the Homewood Neighborhood: Kenny Rance



Northside Residents Redevelopment Council

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- Kenny Rance: And so it makes it more challenging for families to get rooted and to get connected into a community, and that is what we had. Homewood, what was also very interesting is that though it was predominantly African American, we had a bunch of white folks there as well. And I didn't experience a lot of racial beef or disparities like I would if I had crossed over into Northeast Minneapolis where my children now go to school. And I must admit I was very resistant to them going to school in Northeast Minneapolis. Because of the racial stigma from times in the past and we've now seen what has taken place in Northeast Minneapolis. Far more racially diverse. So I know I said a mouthful, but I think that it is all interconnected and you know when you talk about this whole Minnesota Nice, you drop that N and it becomes Minnesota Ice and the winters aren't just the cold thing here. The disparities are even colder. Highest in economics, I mean we're in the Near North, look at the unemployment rate. Yet Minnesota has what, 17 Fortune 500 corporations here, one of the highest literacy rates in the nation, one of the best public school systems still. And even the public school system here is segregated. There's a lot of wealth here and philanthropy yet African Americans, Native Americans and Latinos struggle. And if the Twin Cities does not make equity, inclusion and diversity, if we don't put that on the forefront. They will not, in my opinion, be able to sustain the quality of life that they have currently. So did I get off topic? I just started spit balling.
- Malaika: No, that was great. I have so many follow up questions about what you shared. So you have a really unique perspective having left in '88 and then come back for a little bit and then been gone for a while, but I'm guessing still coming back at times to visit family. So when you think about the changes that you've seen in the community, can you pinpoint a specific time when those started to happen? Has it been gradual? Has it been rapid?
- Kenny Rance: Change in the community? I think I began to see changes in the community when I was in high school. You had the influx of a lot of people from Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, Nebraska. And a lot of low income folks. And with that came a lot of their ills and dysfunction - the proliferation of gangs, drugs. And not saying that, you know, Minneapolis has its own history of organized crime it was Al Capone, Jewish mafia, etc. But I remember in high school a good friend of mine was actually murdered in my high school my senior year at North, Pedro Ramos, and that was due to gangs and that was just a horrific, it was just a horrific event and was very significant to say the least. He's dearly missed. So we now have these other communities where people are coming to Money-apolis because of the general assistance of the welfare that is made available to them. And I think that mentality, that ignorance, served as a virus in the community. And I think that it's very unfortunate.
- Malaika: Were those people moving into Homewood specifically or?
- Kenny Rance: No, I don't think Homewood because I think you really kinda need to look up the boundaries of Homewood. So I would say, when we talk about the city of

A People's History of the Homewood Neighborhood: Kenny Rance



Northside Residents Redevelopment Council

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Minneapolis, it has 13 districts. We live in Ward 5. And in Ward 5 we have Willard-Hay which is the largest neighborhood in North Minneapolis. North Minneapolis has about 30,000 residents, Willard-Hay being the biggest. Homewood, I would say, borders Theodore Wirth Park down there on Xerxes, on the west side of Plymouth to Penn to I would say Oak Park, because once you go past Oak Park to Olsen Highway, then you'll see a shift in the quality of housing. When you take a look at the crime statistics there's some hot spots over there. So in some ways I think we were very insulated. Also too, you know, we had a lot of our leadership that lived in Homewood. Whether it was Jackie Cherryholmes, which was our city councilman or I think Van White lived near us. Randy Staten, our state representative lived right there. Victor Probes, Director of Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights lived right there on Thomas and 12th. I mean Al McFarlane, owner of Insight News lived right across the street. So as far as our power base, and Mr. Hickman lived on Upton. Glover Martin was a big corporate executive over at Controlled Data. Then we had Ray Moppen who was another influential man who lived on Vincent. Carl Eller lived on Washburn. Jay Steel lived on Washburn, so you know, a lot of the prominent African American folks that had the courage and dared to live in Minneapolis were there. And I think because of that, police protection and those kinds of things and resources were there because they demanded it, plus they vote in Homewood. They're politically active in Homewood. And those things matter. I think there was less racial nonsense then you would have experienced in communities elsewhere. And plus my father who grew up in the South wanted to be around his own folks, so that's why we didn't end up in Golden Valley. Which I would have been a completely different individual if that's where I had been raised.

Malaika: You mentioned a number of different schools that you attended. Can you talk a little bit, did others of your neighborhood friends go to those schools with you? Could you tell a difference between the people who were from your neighborhood and those who weren't?

Kenny Rance: Yeah. So I started off in public school, so I was kind of getting kids from the neighborhood. A lot of times that's based on zip code. I guess there was some busing now I think about it. But I was going to Lincoln, which was literally just a block away on Penn. I want to more of an academic challenge and my neighbor, Brian Tyler, he was going to Breck.

Malaika: About what grade were you in?

Kenny Rance: I went there for sixth, seventh, and eighth. So he was a few years older than me. And he's done very well. I'm so impressed with him. He's a fire chief. And then my other neighbor, Beverly Carol James was going to Blake at the time. And then also too I was in Jack and Jill, and so you could do a whole other podcast on just that. And those students, some of those families in Jack and Jill were going to the private schools. And so I visited and I wanted to be challenged. And so I

A People's History of the Homewood Neighborhood: Kenny Rance



Northside Residents Redevelopment Council

"Exploring, expanding, and exercising our Northside privilege"

started at Breck and wasn't the academics that was challenging. It was just the politics and the social adjustment and dealing with the racism there. Let me give you an example. My seventh-grade year I had a US History class and her name was Ms. Prentis and she was from South Carolina because I remember she had a talk like that. And so we'd do these book reports and it was always very interesting when I would get the book report list of the people that we could do our reports on I never saw people of color, ever. At the time, my big brother Tyrone Terrell who was Civil Rights Director for the City of Minneapolis and we met through the Big Brothers organization and we're still close to this day. He's a mentor to my son and my affiliation with the Men of March. And my son, I take my son too. We'll be probably going there this afternoon, was like you know what, you've got to forget that list man. And so he would pick out people of that era for me to study. So I did a book report on A. Philip Randolph the Sleeping Car Porters and...

Kenny Rance:

So I go, he's got me reading up on it. I'm learning. So I go and I present my paper. I did one on him, I did one on Nat Love, Deadwood Dick the biggest black cowboy. And I remember I would always get A's. I like to think it was I got A's because I'd done the work and it was A-work. Sometimes I think that I may have gotten A's because I was writing about African Americans that weren't in the history books and so it was an education for not only myself but Ms. Prentiss as well. And so I remember one morning I was going to turn in my report, I had my little cover, I think it was on Deadwood Dick. And there was a girl named Katie and she looked over at my report. She said, 'Kenny, how come you always do your reports on black people?' And I said, 'Katie, how come you always do your reports on white people?' And that was that. So one day we were going through US history and slavery, the slave period and we had a classroom debate and Ms. Prentiss divided the class. And we were all senators, we had the Northern senators and we had the Southern senators. And we were supposed to debate slavery and I was selected as a Southern senator from the state of Mississippi and I was supposed to debate for slavery. I'm the only black person in that class and not only was it the South and having to debate slavery, but from Mississippi of all places? And so I raised my hand and I said, 'Ms. Prentiss can I be from a Northern state?' She said, 'No Kenneth, you know, it's okay, just be from the Southern state.' I said, 'are you sure? I mean, you know, I'd love to be a Northern state.' 'No, no, you're a Southern state.' And then I said, 'I can't do it. I will not do it.' 'Well then you're gonna have to go to the office.' 'Well then I'll just have to go to the office.' Because I could not, even as a class experiment argue for the horrific violence and oppression of myself and my people. That would be like saying you Jewish dudes, I want you to be for the Third Reich and Nazi Germany and argue as to why the internment camps and the Holocaust was legit. It was horrible. And so I got sent to the office and had that ever happened to my son, it would not have ended well, let's just say. And so it was those kinds of things that were just completely wrong.

A People's History of the Homewood Neighborhood: Kenny Rance



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"Exploring, expanding, and exercising our Northside privilege"

Kenny Rance: But thank god that my mentor Tyrone Terrell outside of what I was being taught in schools was teaching me about my people and African American studies and he took me to see Louis Farrakhan. And when I was with Big Brothers and other little brothers were going to the Twins baseball games he had me reading the Dred Scott Decision and Plessy vs. Ferguson and Brown vs. Board and we were going to civil rights protests and rallies and helping me learn about myself and my history and my people. So I could not do that. But to put a seventh grader in a situation like that is just completely wrong. So after a while you get enough of that nonsense. And I said, you know what? I got to go to public school, I'm slipping away from my folks. And so I went to North. It was a stark contrast but I loved it. And that's why I would never subject my children to that. And to be caught up in the love affair, that's what I call the love affair. And unfortunately there are probably too many blacks in the Twin Cities that are caught up in the love affair. And that's what I think makes this such a very unique city. A very unique place. And because of that, that's why we're number one on these lists of oppression.

Malaika: When you moved back here, your most recent time, 2013 you said? Did you consider moving back to Homewood?

Kenny Rance: Initially, yeah. At the time there just weren't, there were some houses kinda going up here and there and so we were trying to be patient and wait and get the kids into school and my wife working. And so I transferred with my firm that I worked with and so the opportunity for the home in Lynn Park came up. And what's so funny is I bought the home from a family that I grew up with in Jack and Jill. They were renting to their daughter and then her husband got a job transfer so the house was sitting there and I was like, well, I'd like to purchase it. And it was the best of what we wanted. Could I live elsewhere? Yes. But I don't want to live anywhere else. For as many issues as people claim that there are over in North Minneapolis, I love North Minneapolis. I have no desire to live in Eden Prairie or Edina or Golden Valley, none of that. I like living in a community with people that I have common interests with, people that look like me. People that are not going to be threatened by this black skin. It's safer. I don't need to be harassed by Edina police department, which has some of the highest rates of motor vehicle arrests and stops in the state because of the car that I drive or the neighborhoods that I'm riding through. Hell, they just arrested a black man for walking in the street. Was it about a year, year and a half ago? I don't need that. Does North Minneapolis have its share of issues? Yeah it does. But you know, it's where my base is and it is definitely a community that is on the come up. And the amount of gentrification that is taking place in North Minneapolis, as a homeowner I'm benefiting from it, but it's deeply concerning as well.

Malaika: If you could design any sort of policy or program that you think would be beneficial on the Northside and what would it be?



Northside Residents Redevelopment Council

"Exploring, expanding, and exercising our Northside privilege"

Kenny Rance:

That's a great question. I think that it's all interconnected. So I think that you have to have a stable home life and that requires jobs and economic stability. I think that then you have to have the right kind of school system. When you have high concentrations of poverty based upon zip codes then you will have educational disparities. The Minneapolis Public school system should do a better job at spreading out the disparities amongst the system as opposed to concentrating it based upon zip code code or zone. Even though they say that you have the ability to go to the school that you want, if you are lower income and you are dependent on public transportation it is more challenging to be able to get your kid to the school of your choice. It may be more convenient to go to the local school. But if you're dealing with renting and you're moving from Northside to Southside to St. Paul to Apple Valley back to Brooklyn Center or whatever, it's hard to get continuity. And if you don't have a job that provides health insurance and then you know there are health-related challenges, then that becomes a factor. We have mass incarceration and that's very real. When you take a look at the ACLU study Picking Up the Pieces and they did that in 2012 and you take a look at the fourth precinct for North Minneapolis and the excessive amount of over-policing and ticketing, some would even say harassment of lower income folks. I sit on the Minneapolis Police Conduct Review panel and I review officer misconduct cases and you know, you see certain things that are excessive. And so, the odds are against us and there are so many institutions that have a hand or a foot in our communities and they are controlling them.

Kenny Rance:

Now on the flip side, we as black people, we need to do better. All this in-school suspension and classroom management, we need to do a better job at parenting our children. You know all this fighting and nonsense and BS, that's got to stop. These children have an opportunity for a free public education and they're pissing it away. And a lot of it, unfortunately, is due to trauma - generational, systemic and so we have got to focus on achieving and all of us doing better. And criminal activity isn't the way to do it. Because you see at the end of the day if you've decided you're going to make your money on the hustle, you're poisoning your own community. And it is tolerated over North. But you can't go and sell and push that poison in sections of South Minneapolis, right? You can't go across 55 over into Golden Valley and push that heroin or that crack. But they let it go down on West Broadway and Lyndale, between Lyndale and Fremont. So not only are you killing your own community, and it's definitely a pathway to either the penitentiary or the grave. It's not right. There's gotta be a better way, and so we've got to change our mindset. But if 70% of your existence in this nation has been as a captured people, then you're going to experience you know, those repercussions. But we still got to do better. Some people would even argue that we may have done off better when we were in segregation than we are now allegedly free. So I wish I had that magic program, that panacea that was going to just cure all of our ills. We could fulfill Dr. King's dream of blacks and whites getting along and I do want that. I want that for my children and I'm committed to trying to make a better way. And I



Northside Residents Redevelopment Council

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think that's one of the reasons why I choose, I make a conscious choice to live here. To be able to work toward putting some more equanimity, some justice back into the system because the stakes are high.

Kenny Rance:

And with our president now, it's even higher. With these pernicious laws in our state legislature, the stakes are high. These no tolerance policies in our public school system, stakes are high. Prison industrial complex, stakes are high. Health disparities and though we have the state exchanges, stakes are high. HIV rates, stakes are high. We can just go on down the... Next they'll be addressing welfare reform, stakes are high. Section eight vouchers, they're doing it in Minneapolis. They got black folks living out in communities that were unheard of when I was a kid, keep them away. This whole bond over the light rail, stakes are high. The amount of gentrification that's taking place in 59A and 59B. This is 59B, that's 59A, state house districts, stakes are so high. And where will we be sitting at that table when those decisions are made? And that's concerning because it's said that we're invited to a dinner party, either you're sitting at the table, you're serving those who are sitting at the table, or you're on the table because you're on the menu. Unfortunately, too many of us are on the menu and that doesn't sit well with me. Not if I'm trying to make a future for my children and others. It's wrong. And if people don't speak for those that may not know how to speak. I mean you're living in such crisis that they don't have the time or the capacity to speak because they are just trying to make it from end of the month? They're trying to live week to week, day to day. The homelessness rate, yet policies and decisions are being made on a local, state, national level that have just got us on the menu. That's why this project you're doing, this is so great. To show that North Minneapolis isn't what you see depicted on these biased newscasts. Some of the reporting in our mainstream media. That we're not all gun-toting, crack-selling niggas out here wilding out, but there are hardworking families that are trying to do their best to raise their children up right and work and enjoy themselves and life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But it's not what you always see on channel 5 or 11. And continuing to perpetrate those myths. And yeah, we have our share of crime and those issues, but it's concentrated.

Kenny Rance:

But as this gentrification continues to take place, they're going to just disperse those people, and it's coming. And that's one of the biggest things that I've seen change in Homewood. My mom had, it was about two years ago, they had a neighborhood association meeting and I was amazed at the amount of diversity in the neighborhood, same sex couples, young white couples with families, interracial couples. Minneapolis Police Department came, one of the lieutenants came and spoke to us. And they're talking about making changes and all those, those are all great things. But when you talk about young families of color being able to buy into Homewood, it's not happening. Why? Because people that have cash money, folks might want to move into the city because they feel it's a little safer. They have cash, they can offer above listing. You have realtors that are canvassing the neighborhood, letting people know that if they want to sell, so a lot of these houses are selling without even listing. And then you have young



Northside Residents Redevelopment Council

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couples that want to buy and they have to go to the banks to secure financing. So Associated, and Wells, and some of these other banks that have been slapped on the wrist, not loaning to people. Damn, we can't even get bank loans to live in communities with people that look like us? Right? So now they're excluded. And when you take a look at where the wealth is in the city of Minneapolis, it's South Minneapolis. Look how residential it is from say 42nd down Penn. All of this is turned over, it's turned over. Are we going to have an opportunity to partake in that? Are we getting pushed out? And when the light rail comes in and when you see the development plans they have for the Harrison community, you see the development plans that they have along the Mississippi River. I don't know where we're gonna be. You know, you see the people of my mother's generation, of that silent generation, of those boomers. When those houses turn over, will it go to their children or are they going to sell those houses because they may not have had enough money for retirement for people? So it's very real.

Malaika: Thank you so much. This is a ton of really great perspective. Is there anything else you want to share about growing up in Homewood or your thoughts on Homewood now?

Kenny Rance: I liked growing up in Homewood and I did not realize the quality, the value, the good times. My fondest childhood memories are just days in the community, you know? It took me having lived in Washington DC, Los Angeles, California, Charlotte, now back here, to really be able to appreciate that. I think as an adult, as a man, a husband, now that I'm a father and looking at other communities that I've lived in, we had something very, very unique and I really long for that for my son and my children. You know, where the kids played and the parents knew each other, they hung out. They were going to the same churches, and sorority events, or civic organizations and they worked together collectively. And even though I live over in North now, it's still kind of a challenge. And so not to be maudlin, not to be nostalgic, but it was great. I had a great childhood. That's why sometimes I get up in arms when people try to crap on where I'm from, it's just not cool. You know, and if you live in an urban environment then it's going to come with it urban woes. But my best friends and experiences and good people. You know Mr. McFarlane gave me my first job out of college, Homewood. My barber and one of my best friends today Tarik Propes, Homewood, you know? My neighbor in Lynn Park, Homewood. So it was good. It was good.

Malaika: Well thank you again, this was really lovely.

A People's History of the Homewood Neighborhood: Kenny Rance