

Martinez Oral History Project

Interview Date: June 3, 2020
Interview Location: Homeless Encampment at Amphitheater in Martinez
Interviewer: Deborah Zamaria
Interviewee: Lori Ann Ray

Lori was born on August 16, 1967 in Burlington, Vermont to James Darrel Ray and Diane Evelyn Ray.

James Darrel Ray was born on August 17, 1947 in Richmond, California. He worked for Oakland Fisheries and now owns Blue Ray Fish. He's retired and is currently living in Rio Vista. James Darrel has roots in the Cherokee nation, while Lori's mother is primarily of Northern European descent, specifically Irish and German.

Lori is not absolutely sure where her mother Diane Evelyn Ray was born, but her birthday is on July 22, 1947. Her mother, in addition to caring for her children had many jobs throughout her life. She managed apartment buildings, did clerical work and is currently living in Pinole, taking care of Lori's grandfather.

Lori's parents met at Harry Ells High School in Richmond, California. They were high school sweethearts and both graduated from Harry Ells. Together they had a son, Michael Allen Ray who was born on November 26, 1964 and Brittany Steele Ray, a half-sister of Lori's, is now in her early 30s.

Lori's parents divorced when she was seven years old. Unfortunately, she witnessed the argument that caused the divorce. At the time, the family was living at 11 Miffen Avenue in El Sobrante, California.

After that, Lori, her mom and siblings moved around a great deal, as her mom was going where there was work. For awhile Lori attended Rancho Elementary in El Sobrante on San Pablo Dam Road and El Portal, a school that no longer exists. But Lori says she has attended almost every school in the Bay Area. She made friends easily during all of these transitions, but it was still difficult.

She went to at least two different high schools, Pittsburg High School and Richmond High. She would have graduated from Pittsburg High but she got pregnant when she was only 15 ½ years old and had to drop out.

While pregnant, her mother asked her to leave home, so Lori went to stay with her father and his new wife in Pittsburg, California on Lverage Road. Her stepmother eventually kicked her out as well and she went to live with her aunt. However, once she had the baby, she felt she was being a burden on her aunt so she left and went to live with her father's best friend's son, Mike Prien. Mike was kind to her and took care of her and her baby.

Jeremy Michael Ray was born on November 26, 1984. He currently lives in Dayton, Ohio with his girlfriend and has a landscaping business. Although he was raised by Lori for the first part of his life, when Jeremy turned 15, her mother took him into her home and raised him.

When she was 17 years old, Lori got her Certified Nursing Associate (CNA) license and this has served her well as she still works, caring for people. Her first job was at Roosevelt Convalescent Care home in Richmond, CA.

Her second child, Rachel Renee Ray was born on May 31, 1993. The father was Billy Allen. Rachel is currently in Omaha, Nebraska and has two daughters. Because she has struggled with addiction for most of her life, Lori was only able to care for Rachel until Rachel was nine years old. Lori's brother Michael and his wife "kidnapped" Rachel and raised her in Richmond, CA, before they moved with her to Omaha, Nebraska.

The twins, Crystal and Jonathon Edward Reisbeck, Jr. (John) were born on November 26, 1991. Crystal currently lives at the Homeless Encampment in Martinez with her boyfriend Anton. John lives under a bridge near Granger's Wharf in Martinez.

Lori's husband at the time, Jonathon E. Reisbeck, and his family (mother and sisters primarily), helped to raise Crystal and John. The family moved a great deal and Lori was continuing to struggle with her addiction. Lori and her husband divorced in 2000. At this time, Lori was staying with whatever friend would provide shelter and often would be on the streets.

A friend by the name of Mark Hernandez, who lived in Pittsburg, became Lori's "safe house" during this difficult time. She loves him and he is still in her life.

Lori stated that she's been using drugs, primarily Meth, since she was 15 years old. She entered into a drug program at one point that existed on San Pablo Avenue and Church Lane. She worked the program and got clean, but couldn't sustain it.

Lori is a good worker and well liked by the other residents in the encampment. Like her mom, (with whom she says she shares a lot of characteristics, both physical and behavioral), Lori has worked all of her life at many different jobs.

In addition to working "on call" in her capacity as a CNA, she frequently can be seen at the Martinez Marina, detailing a boat that belongs to a friend. About nine years ago, she was on the dock at the Martinez Marina, watching the Sturgeon Derby. She saw a man, Charles Robinson, with a nice boat and he asked her if she'd like to go out in it for a ride. They've been friends ever since and she details his boat. She also does landscaping and painting and has installed floors. This is an area where Lori shines and she enjoys seeing her finished work. She even does some weeding around the encampment.

Lori has four adult children and seven grandchildren. She is a survivor and a strong person; a “giver” who is very generous with her time and always willing to help out someone who might be in need.