

## Wiregrass Black History Project, RG 298

### Themar Long Interview Transcript

**Date Span:** February 10, 2025

**Biographical Sketch:** Themar Long is the son of Ted Long, subject of this interview. He is a professional photographer in Baltimore, MD. Theodore (Ted) Long (d. 2014) was a native of Dothan, AL, who became a hair stylist with 23 credits in International Movie Database (IMDB) for films such as *Hustle & Flow* (2005), *The Rosa Parks Story* (2002), *Ruby Bridges* (1998), *Waiting to Exhale* (1995), *The Wiz* (1978), and others.

**Organizational Sketch:** The Wiregrass Black History Project is a collaboration between the Wiregrass Black History Channel on YouTube (by David "Mit" Kirkland) and the Wiregrass Archives at Troy University Dothan Campus. Funded in 2024- 25 by Troy University and the Society of American Archivists Foundation through its Catalyst Grant.

The Wiregrass Black History Channel will host edited versions of the interviews. The Wiregrass Archives will make the raw interviews available on its YouTube channel and create metadata records and finding aids that link to the project and to individual video interviews.

**Scope / Content Note:** Video interview transcript of Themar Long, son of Ted Long, who discusses his father's career as a prominent hair stylist for the movies. Long also discusses how his father's interests, work, and family moves affected him at the time and later in life.

**Provenance:** Interview conducted by Billy Causey, Jr. Provided to the Wiregrass Archives as part of the grant-funded Wiregrass Black History Project.

**Processing Notes:** Transcriptions made by MS Word AI, then edited by Dr. Martin T. Olliff. Revisions planned to update and correct transcriptions.

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## **Themar Long interviewed by Billy Causey, Jr. about Ted Long, February 10, 2025**

### **00:00:01 Billy Causey**

Audio's rolling, if I can have you clap for me, please. Thank you. Thank you. All right. Well, let's get started. I'd like to have you introduce yourself and then tell us your connection to Mr. Ted Long.

### **00:00:16 Themar Long**

Hello, my name is Themar Long and Ted Long is my father.

### **00:00:22 Billy Causey**

Awesome, awesome. Awesome. Well, we get the questions back up. Tell us about your fondest memory of your father.

### **00:00:31 Themar Long**

I . . . I'd have to say my fondest memory of my father is knowing the work that he's done in hair styles by working for TV and movie and becoming a massage therapist and a . . . a rolfer.

### **00:00:48 Billy Causey**

OK. So tell me a little bit about his profession. You know, what did he do specifically as a hairstylist that made him so important and special, like, you know why are we talking about him today?

### **00:00:57 Themar Long**

Well, today I'd have to say one of the first thing that made him special, being a hair stylist. He was one of the first African American hairstylist for NBC Studios. He originally started doing hair on Barbara Walters and which was . . . and Joe Garagiola back in the early 70s.

He moved from Alabama, but going to college at Tuskegee University, or Tuskegee Institute back in that particular time frame, and moved up to New York City in Harlem and decided to become a hair stylist.

### **00:01:36 Billy Causey**

Excellent, excellent. So I'm, I know that he and your mom owned a beauty salon. What do you remember about the beauty salon?

### **00:01:44 Themar Long**

My fondest memories and memories of . . . of the beauty salon with them was a number . . . they were hardworking hair stylists. You know, these were individuals who learned from scratch on how to do hair because they didn't come from that background.

So moving up to New York, I guess some of my memories of them in the salon of the many people that came through, a lot of people from the community of Harlem and from the surrounding areas, you have people that used to come from New Jersey, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx, as well as some of the

stars that would come through, that he was doing hair for on movies would stop by on the weekends when they weren't shooting on set. And then some of the TV personalities would come through as well.

**00:02:29 Billy Causey**

OK. OK. Tell me a little bit about this time in TV, you know. Did he ever talk much about his time working in TV and movies? What was that conversation like? How did you growing up around and kind of perceive your father? Did you look at him as like, this big star, he's always out on the set? Was it more of, like, you know, my father works in movies, but he's the hairstylist? Like, how was your perspective and perception about that?

**00:02:51 Themar Long**

Well, I have to say my perspective and perception on him in the movie industry was kind of a . . . a . . . a big circle, never looked at him as being a star, but more so a connection to the stars.

You know, not many people get a chance to kind of be hands-on with a lot of the stars like he was. I mean, starting with Barbara Walters. You know, how often were people, I mean, as infamous as she was, would be able to actually be able to go over to her home, sit down and talk and be around that particular crowd?

As well as when he expanded his workings with Saturday Night Live and back when the Garrett Morris days of . . . the Chevy Chase days of Saturday Night Live, and then a lot of the movies that he did were pretty vast. So we . . . we didn't look at him as a . . . a star, but kind of the connection to the star.

So when you talk to people and you would say, "my father's a hair stylist" and they would ask, you know, "well what, whose hair does . . . does he do?" You would sit there and start naming off names and people would be like, "Oh my gosh, that . . . that's just fantastic. What kind of . . . how exciting."

**00:04:05 Billy Causey**

Awesome. Did he ever talk too much about his time on movie sets and on TV shows?

**00:04:10 Themar Long**

Uh, sometimes here and there he would. For, like, Barbara Walters and doing the Today shows, we would get a little tidbits of his interaction with them, and he was actually interviewed by her about his life in in hair styles.

And then with Paul Winfield that he did hair for, and Cecily Tyson, which was in the movie King that was filmed out in Savannah.

And then some of the personalities from Saturday Night Live, we got to meet and . . . and interact with them as well. So we . . . we got to meet a few people here and there.

**00:04:46 Billy Causey**

OK. How long would he be away each time he worked on a movie?

**00:04:49 Themar Long**

Ohh, that would vary depending upon the length of the movie, depending upon where the movie was on location. It could go from anywhere if it was a short stint, it would be maybe up to three weeks up, maybe up to 6 to 8 weeks. So he would travel to different cities for productions, even television things would . . . would last a little bit longer. So around that about that time.

**00:05:16 Billy Causey**

Did you bring you on set with him for anything?

**00:05:18 Themar Long**

We went on set . . . the one I can fondestly remember that we're going on set with him was the movie King that he filmed, that was filmed down in Savannah, Georgia, where we got to actually sit on the sidelines of the production and watch the actors do their thing. And see him doing hair between takes and, you know, sprucing things up and see how things were kind of manipulated here and there. So that was probably the fondest one that I can remember.

And he did one play and I can't remember the name. I think it was with Patti LaBelle, he did the hairstyles and we actually got to see the actual final production of that.

**00:05:58 Billy Causey**

Really? Can you name your fondest memory of an actor or actress that worked with your father that you met?

**00:06:03 Themar Long**

Oh, I have to say, probably Diana Ross and probably I would say Barbara Walters would probably be some of the fondest ones. And he even worked on the movie Waiting To Exhale with Layla Rashawn, and Whitney Houston, and Angela Bassett, Wesley Snipes, and he's got a lot of photos of their interaction with them, so that would probably be some of my fondest ones.

**00:06:32 Billy Causey**

Okay. What would you like to tell us about your dad?

**00:06:35 Themar Long**

How innovative he waw. He was . . . he was a perfectionist when it came to the things that he did. He . . . he studied a lot, he was a consummate reader, he . . . he was always learning. There wasn't a project or anything that he wasn't willing to tackle, even if he didn't know about it. So when it came to doing movies, he always studied that period of time to make sure that each hairstyle that he did on that particular person was done to perfection. How it was depicted to be in that particular era.

**00:07:14 Billy Causey**

OK. Is there any one moment about your father and your life with him and his, you know, time working in movie sets, his sort of, career, that stands out to you and sort of defines your father?

**00:07:23 Themar Long**

I . . . I guess his professionalism, his ability to work with other people, to learn the, you know, the . . . the mannerisms of other people too, and . . . and . . . and his ability to adapt in those particular environments. You know it . . . it's a . . . it's an art to be able to work with so many ethnicities and different people that you interact with and that . . . that's a talent within itself.

And his ability to be able to share his experience and learn from experiences of other people was . . . was a . . . a big influence on me on how to be able to guide yourself through life being able to work with different people, which inspired me on doing what I did coming up in life.

**00:08:16 Billy Causey**

Did you ever feel like your . . . your father was sort of famous? Did you ever have that sort of like “wow, my dad star” kind of moment?

**00:08:22 Themar Long**

All the time. I mean, you know, with the with the things that he did when he worked with in the movies, we always felt that he was a star in doing the things with the stars that he worked with. You know, his interaction with people went far beyond just doing hair, he became friends with those people and . . . and a few people came over to the house when we moved down to Alabama. And we also visited a few stars homes. So we always felt that connection that he was our star.

**00:08:52 Billy Causey**

Okay. Awesome. Awesome. So I want to dig into my . . . my questions now. You said that your father had inspired you with his love of photography. Can you walk me through that? How, you know, the . . . the way that your father would take the photos for his business and his salon and for his book kind of inspired you to pick up photography as well.

**00:09:10 Themar Long**

Well, I mean, when I was growing up and we, he had an old Nikon F and, you know, he kind of taught me how to use that in the framing of photography and how interesting photography was and how it interacted and the things that he did.

So when I was growing up at, I guess, the age of 9 and 10, I started taking pictures. And that expanded into high school from taking pictures for our local football team and for the yearbook and, eventually, through the businesses that I owned, taking pictures of food, which kind of promoted a lot of the things that represent us in this day and age of social media. And now I'm a full time photographer doing sports photography in the local area.

**00:09:56 Billy Causey**

Awesome. Did your . . . did your father ever talk much about his photography work?

**00:10:03 Themar Long**

No, he didn't talk that much about other than in the training and the educating of how it should be done, you know, and showing different tid . . . tidbits on . . . on how the interaction of your subject and the image coming through the camera, because back then it wasn't instantaneous, it was all on film. So you'd have to wait for that product to be developed, so it would take a time frame from here to there. But he would always look at my images after they came back and say, OK, you need to frame it this way, you know. Why do you have so much top sky in that . . . that photo? Bring in your subject in closer.

So a lot of information he passed on that it really helped me, and I still remember to this day when I'm taking pictures on how to do my framing.

**00:10:48 Billy Causey**

Could you . . . uh . . . I'm just trying to get like one sound bite. Like maybe could you just say like, you know, my . . . my father was always an inspiration to me?

**00:10:53 Themar Long**

Sure. And he was always an inspiration to me on my development on where I am today because without that image, and without seeing his work that he did and his dedication to his craft, I would have not have been inspired to do the things and take the chances that I took.

**00:11:21 Billy Causey**

I want to talk a little bit about, you know, what it was like for you. Was it a culture shock going from, you know, New York and Harlem to Dothan, AL, where it's much quieter and sleepier?

**00:11:30 Themar Long**

Yeah, well, it . . . I wouldn't say so much of a cult . . . you know, for me, a culture shock going from New York City to Dothan kind of ended when I was small because we would travel back and forth. I remember getting on the train before we could afford to fly. We would get on the Amtrak and we would ride that train from New York City all the way to Dothan, and I would learn the . . . the . . . the different intricacies of how life was different from the city to the South.

So when we, when we finally moved to Dothan in the '70s, people were more culture shocked than I was trying to understand why would you want to do that? Which we really have a choice because our folks moved us there.

But learning and becoming adapted to that environment was shockful, because things were much slower and things were a little bit different. The racial divide was a little, you know, a little slight or people weren't as united there as they were there, but it was a great place to be.

**00:12:42 Billy Causey**

Do you have any fond memories of Dothan?

**00:12:43 Themar Long**

Ohh yes. I mean high school was fantastic. I really enjoyed living in the South it . . . it . . . and it really built a lot of character for me on understanding that everything isn't skyscrapers and large buildings, that rural cities have a lot of culture.

And it showed me the . . . what built the backbone of our family, what made it so strong and so willing. So it was . . . it, you know, Dothan always inspired me of a small town, yet big with a lot of inspiration.

**00:13:24 Billy Causey**

OK. What about New York? You know what are your thoughts and feelings about the time you spent in New York?

**00:13:28 Themar Long**

Ohh man, New York City. I . . . I . . . it, you know, you can't beat New York City. I mean it is the . . . the . . . the megatropolis of all. I mean there's something always going on. There's so many cultures. There's so much to learn. There's so much to enjoy. There's so much inspiration, you know, it's . . . it's like a . . . a candy store and you just can go in and you can just look at the vast amounts of items there and just pick and choose and enjoy.

So New York City was fantastic and I get back every once in a while to kind of look back on the days when I grew up there and it's . . . it just, you know, brings back so many fond memories.

**00:14:14 Billy Causey**

OK. Ok. Do you want to talk a little bit about your time in the military as well?

**00:14:17 Themar Long**

My . . . my . . . my time in the military was . . . was good, you know. I really had an opportunity when I went into the military to get more of a vision of how other cultures mixed together in a small knit group, being on a base and work as a single unit and get along. you know.

We . . . you have people from so many different areas -- from the West Coast, from the South, you have people from up east. And you . . . you brought so many of these people together who had no idea about each other and their experiences. And you got to learn and work together. And you . . . you know, the things that we did on surviving was . . . was . . . was really good.

**00:15:11 Billy Causey**

OK. Do you ever watch a movie and then think about the things that your father may have taught you when you were young about, like the style and the hair and the makeup and the way that people are

dressed and even some of the lighting techniques that you learn from photography? Would that [unintelligible] actually make you think about your dad?

**00:15:25 Themar Long**

Every time I look at a movie, you know, my father's influence on what he did in those movies come to the forefront.

The first thing I always look at is a hair style. And then I'll look at the makeup, and then I'll look at what they're wearing, and then I'll go back even through the credits and see who did the makeups, and who did the hairstyles and things of that nature. So each movie I look at, I always look at some of the things that were created and I envision him and what he did at those particular times, also.

And I . . . I still go back and look at some of his old movies also like the Bing Long . . . Bingo Long Travelling All Stars And Motor Kings that had Richard Pryor and that had James Earl Jones and all of those, and as you look at those old costumes and uniforms and the things that they wore and the things that . . . the hairstyles that they had and how he manipulated things in that era to really . . . to look at things that are done now when people do a retro movie and you look at the similarities. So I often look at that as well.

**00:16:34 Billy Causey**

Your father got to work on The Wiz. Do you want to talk about that for a little bit?

**00:16:36 Themar Long**

Ohh my goodness. What . . . what . . . what a joy to know that he worked with Michael Jackson. I mean, back when he worked on The Wiz, we lived in Alabama and had just moved there, I'd say, the prior year before that production started.

So as soon as we moved there, he went back to work on that film and we rented a small apartment in the same building we moved from. And he would go on set every day and just bring back, you know, photos and different stories of who he worked with, with Diana Ross, with Michael, with Nipsey Russell and all of the actors . . . and Lena Horne . . . and the actors of that movie.

And that was a joy knowing that movie. I mean, that movie was special to me because I learned, at the age of 16, every word and lyric to that I could recite it because I had watched it so many times.

**00:17:35 Billy Causey**

Do you . . . do you have any people that your father used to work with that you keep up with at all?

**00:17:38 Themar Long**

Not really. I don't get around those individuals, other than family members. There's David Rose of Dothan, and we usually communicate through social media. But other than that, no, not really. Not really.



**00:17:57 Billy Causey**

How often do you, because your mother still living, how often to you go back to Dothan?

**00:18:00 Themar Long**

I go back to Dothan now, I . . . I get a chance to go back to Dothan at least twice, two to three times a year. My mom's there and I get down to visit her and kind of help her out with things that are going on and things that need to be repaired at the house, and just to give her some company. My sister lives much closer than I do, so she gets there a little bit more often than I can . . . but living here in Baltimore. But I usually go down for maybe two or three weeks every fall and at least once in the summer.

**00:18:34 Billy Causey**

Did your father ever come to visit [unintelligible]?

**00:18:37 Themar Long**

Yes, my father came to visit me in Baltimore twice and . . .

**00:18:44 Billy Causey**

Let's . . . let's [unintelligible] these should be separate questions, alright?

**00:18:47 Themar Long**

Sorry about that.

My father came to visit me twice after here in Baltimore after I opened up my cafe. It was back in 2013, I believe. He was doing a . . . he was a part of the Southeast Alabama Medical Centers board and they were having a board meeting in Washington, DC, and we got together a couple of times when he came up and we had lunch and reminisced and he met my wife, my current wife, for the first time coming up.

And he got a chance to see how I was doing my business which was a cafe in Baltimore.

**00:19:32 Billy Causey**

Do we talk a little bit about how, like, now you're going full time in your photography, something that your father inspired you to do?

**00:19:38 Themar Long**

Well, my, you know my . . . I started doing photography as a young age and then I opened up my own business as a cafe owner and once I closed that down because of COVID, I thought what else would I like to do as my life started to evolve, and I thought about doing photography.

And you know, my father was such a big influence on the photography that he did. And all the pictures that he took, I said, you know, this would be something that I'd like to get into and kind of perfect and take to a professional level. So I'm doing a lot of sports photography here in the DMV and learning an old trick. (chuckles)

**00:20:22 Billy Causey**

OK. Did you have any connection to Mit Kirkland at all before this project?

**00:20:27 Themar Long**

He my father had mentioned him a couple of times, doing some work with him. He worked with Mit on doing a film or a video that he was working on with doing acupuncture and massage work. Then they worked together on that.

**00:20:47 Billy Causey**

Ok. Ok. Ok. Do you have any other thoughts that you'd like to get out in this video?

**00:20:50 Themar Long**

You know, I'd say, you know, my father was a very smart, intellectual, common, he loved the woods, loved to hunt kind of person. So he would . . . he was . . . loved the outdoors he inspired us to . . . to work hard, you know, to stay on the straight and narrow, to always do the best that you could at whatever you were doing.

And he never shied away from anything. So he was . . . that's what made him very successful. He was always willing to . . . to tackle anything that came up and that made him a great hairstylist. And it, you know, it put him in the forefront.

**00:21:40 Billy Causey**

Excellent, alright, let's cut.