

Mr. James Mathews On Education and Employment



Quote 1

“My father's name was Oscar Mathews, Jr., and he worked for the railroad. Not like a chef, but he was a cook on the railroad, and he traveled between Boston, Massachusetts, and Portland for a number of years. And my mother, her name was Llewena Hill Mathews, and she was one of the first graduates of Gorham Normal School which is now the University of Southern Maine. And she was an accomplished pianist, and she also was attempting to become a school teacher, but at the time Black school teachers were not hired.”

Quote 2

“I believe as far as their schooling is concerned, they did not choose to go to school. Like my son is a firefighter, so when he finally decided what he wanted to do, he was able to go to school on his own to become qualified. I have another daughter that when she was living in Florida she went to school down there. In fact, I have two children that lived in Florida for a while and they went to school in Florida for other education, to gain knowledge in that sense. So basically I haven't really provided college education for them because they at the time didn't require it or didn't seem to be needing it at the moment.”

James Mathews was born at Maine General Hospital in Portland, Maine, in 1941. He had four siblings; his father, Oscar Mathews, Jr., was a cook for the railroad that ran between Portland and Boston, and his mother, Llewena Hill Mathews, was one of the first graduates of the Gorham Normal School. His father's family emigrated from Nova Scotia. As a child, he lived with his aunt and uncle in South Portland; the family moved to another home in South Portland when the state took their home to build I-295. Mathews graduated from Portland High School in 1960, and graduated from Southern Maine Vocational Technical Institute with an associate's degree in electronics. He worked for AT&T for thirty seven years. He married Lorene Mathews and had five children. At the time of the interview, he had been a member of the NAACP for thirty five years, serving as the president in the early 1970s, and was an active member of the Green Memorial AME Zion Church. He discusses raising children, family traditions, and what makes the Portland African American community special.

You can listen to the full interview and read a transcript at

https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/4/