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Brock, Joan

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Transcriber: Sophia Maier

Sophia Maier (SM): Wonderful. So if you just want to start by telling us a little bit about your family and how they ended up in the Bronx.

Joan Brock (JB): My mother was born and raised in the Bronx. My father was from Ridgewood on the Queens, Brooklyn border. And when they got married, they lived for three months in Astoria, but my father's mother kept coming over to the house with the key. So my mother said, if the marriage is gonna last, we have to leave. They wound up in the Bronx.

SM: Yeah, and so — No, go ahead.

JB: So I was born and raised in the Bronx.

SM: And what year were you born?

JB: I was born in 1943. I'll be 80 in August.

SM: Happy birthday in advance. So were they both first generation Americans? Were your grandparents born here or abroad?

JB: No, they were first generation Americans. Yeah.

SM: And so what neighborhood were they living in when you were born? Or what neighborhood did you grow up in?

JB: Well, I grew up on Bryant, between 174 and 175, sorry 173 and 174 in the East Bronx. We didn't have any "South Bronx" when I was growing up. It was you lived East of the Concourse or West of the Concourse. And if you lived East of the Concourse, you were a little poorer. And if you lived West of the Concourse [you were better off], and if you lived *on* the Concourse, you were rich.

SM: Yes. Yes, that I've definitely heard. And so what did your parents do for a living?

JB: My mother became pregnant three months after she got married. So she never worked after she got married, but before she got married she had gone to secretarial school, but she was going to earn more money working in a tea factory than working as a secretary. So she worked at a tea factory. My father when they met was a machinist. And he was fixing machines in the tea factory. And they were all eating lunch on the roof. And that's how they met.

SM: Oh, wow. And so he continued with that work after they got married?

JB: No. He bought into a vending machine business where you put a penny in and you got either peanuts or gumballs or charms. And he had a partner on Croes Avenue in the Bronx. And he did that until I was 13 and he bought a hardware store. But my mother never worked except for him a little bit in the hardware store after she got married.

SM: Yeah. And so did either of them have any college education?

JB: My father went to college for six months. But my father was not a reader. In fact, the only book he ever read really through was *Bob, Son of Battle*, about a dog. And when I taught at James Monroe, a kid actually chose that as one of his book report books. And I said, I've read it. He said, You've read *Bob, Son of Battle*? I said, Yes. *Laughs*

SM: Wow, that's funny.

JB: It is.

SM: And so yeah. Tell me a little bit about that neighborhood. What was it like? Was it a predominantly Jewish area?

JB: It was Jewish, mostly Jewish and Italian. There were some blacks. There were some Puerto Ricans, even when I went to kindergarten, my school was integrated. I went to PS 50. So I've always gone to an integrated school. All the buildings were apartment buildings. There were no single family houses. Everybody lived in an apartment building that was either five or six storeys. And the one that I lived in on 1685 Bryant, we lived in three rooms, on the first floor, not the ground floor, but the first floor. My parents slept on a convertible couch in the living room, and my sister and I shared the bedroom. And then when I was 13, and my father bought the store and he was earning more money, we moved to the biggest apartment in the entire building. We moved to a three bedroom apartment on the ground floor. I actually had my own room and my sister had her own room, which was a miracle. Nobody had that. None of my other friends had that. So my room was the party room. That's where we had all the boy and girl parties, in my room.

SM: Really?

JB: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And I went to PS 50 growing up. Interesting, the principal Eva Bloom would not let parents in the building. And if it was raining, the parents had to stand across the street outside because you were not allowed to have umbrellas.

SM: Really?

JB: She was very, very tough. And then for junior high, I went to Herman Ritter, which is very much into music and the arts. It was a very big school for people who were interested in doing plays and singing and musicians, etc. In fact, Al Pacino lived in my building. And when he won his Oscar, he thanked his junior high school drama teacher, because that's where all of our love of the arts — and I became a speech, drama, and English teacher. And we had others in the neighborhood who were either famous or semi famous. We had a Mae West chorus boy in the building. We had a somebody around the corner who was a favorite on The Gong Show *Laughs*. It was just, it was just one of those neighborhoods where everybody was interested. The high school I went to, James Monroe, and I loved high school. I loved James Monroe. I went back to teach there four years after I graduated. And so it was a very — it was like a coming home.

SM: Yeah. And did you continue to teach there throughout your career?

JB: No, no. I only taught it till I had children. I taught there for four years, then I stayed home. Then I did substitute teaching for five years in Rockland County where we had moved. And then I did the last, my last 17 years I did at Ramsey High School in New Jersey.

SM: Okay. Very nice. Yeah, I'm from Monroe, so very close by to you all in Rockland. And when my dad's family moved out of the Bronx, they moved to Rockland first before they came up to my area. So very common area.

JB: We never left Rockland until we moved to North Carolina. We lived in the same house for 52 years.

SM: Oh, my goodness. Yeah. And so, you know, back to the neighborhood a little bit more, what kind of shops and amenities would you like to go to?

JB: The big world was 174 Street. It had all the shops on both sides of the street. You could start with, you know, there was a grocery store where your mother would give you a dollar to buy milk, bread, and eggs. You'd get all that for a dollar. And then you had the candy stores where you would hang out and you had the clothing store. The most famous clothing store on the street was Rosen's. And she had all of her clothes in the window embroidered with her daughter's name or her daughter's initials. And then we had people who lived in the neighborhood, their parents had stores. There was a dry goods store. There was the Chinese laundry which Tommy Yi's father owned. And so it was a very — you really didn't have to leave 174 Street to do all your shopping. The only thing you couldn't get was shoes. You had to go to Fordham Road for shoes. Okay, but everything else you could get right there on the 174. The jeweler, the doctor, everything. The pharmacist, everybody was on 174 Street, even a temple.

SM: Okay. And so did you ever, did you leave often, like the immediate area like to go out?

JB: I was not allowed to take the bus or subway by myself until I was 11. Which in today's world is very young. But once we could take the bus and subway by ourselves, we went all over. We went to Broadway shows. We did the young people's concerts led by Leonard Bernstein. We did Yankee Stadium and the Polo Grounds. We went to Coney Island. We took the train all the way to Coney Island. Once you were allowed to take the subway or the bus by yourself, then your world really opened up. We never knew that we were poor, let me put it that way, because everybody lived exactly the same way. So nobody ever considered themselves poor. We just thought everybody lived the way we lived. When television came. It's interesting, we had our first television in 1948, a couple of months before my sister was born. And we got to watch programs where people actually had their own houses. And then we began to say, a lot of people have their own houses. It opened up a different world.

SM: No, that's definitely been — from doing these interviews — that's definitely been the understanding that I've gotten as well. Yeah. And so I guess maybe before you were able to travel throughout the city, what did you all like to do for fun when you were a kid?

JB: Well, we played all kinds of street games, you know, that we did. We played potsy, which in your vernacular is hopscotch. We even played Mumbley Peg with knives. We each had a knife. You'd throw it and divide up the territory. We played checkers with the tops of bottles. We played all kinds of ball games with our spaldeens. You know, and things like that. Nobody ever said Spalding. We didn't even know that was the correct pronunciation. I had no idea. And we hung around. We did a lot of hanging around on the street corners.

SM: Did anyone ever give you a hard time for hanging out in the street?

JB: Yeah. When we would try and sing sometimes and people would throw water from the fire escape onto us and say, "Shut up!"

SM: *Laughs* Oh, that's funny. And so what about music? What kind of music did you like to listen to?

JB: Obviously, it was the beginning of rock and roll. So that's what we listened to. We bought all 45 records. We bought some albums, but mostly 45's because they were cheap. They were only like 49 cents. You know, so you could afford them. And candy stores often had jukeboxes. So for a dime, you could hear your favorite song.

SM: And who was your favorite to listen to?

JB: Well, personally, obviously Elvis, but also Johnny Mathis. He did all the romantic songs.

SM: And what about food? You know, you mentioned going to the candy store or what kinds of things?

JB: We were not we were not a kosher family, so we ate everything. My grandparents, my father's parents, owned the luncheonette. So he hadn't been kosher as a child, because he ate in the store. My mother's mother was kosher, but we were not in any way shape or form. So we ate everything. Every Sunday we went to the Chinese restaurant. Or if we didn't go to the Chinese restaurant or my grandparents' house in Astoria, we went to the Italian restaurant on Boston road. We also went to a deli. We had a deli right on 174 Street. So I mean, we ate out and we ate in. I had to learn to cook at 13. Because my poor — my father owned the store and my mother went to work with him, so I had to learn to cook.

SM: And how was that experience?

JB: Not good. My sister was eight years old, lost five pounds the first three months I cooked.

SM: *Laughs* What kind of things were you cooking?

JB: I was trying to cook everything. You know, I was trying to cook steaks. I was trying to cook lamb chops. I was trying to cook everything that would be a regular meal for us. But I didn't do well. You know, at that time parents ate everything well done. So if it didn't come out like shoe leather, they didn't like it. *Laughs* So it was that kind of thing where maybe I didn't do it enough. Which, you know, today we eat everything medium rare and everything, but not back then, everything was like shoe leather.

SM: Hm, I didn't know that. That's funny.

JB: Oh yeah.

SM: And so yeah, a little bit back to school. Are there any particular memories from, let's say, public school or junior high school that really stand out to you?

JB: Well, the funny thing was, I knew at age six I wanted to be a teacher. I had been reading since I was three. And I would help the other kids who were learning to read, and I knew I wanted to be a teacher. And the thing that was funny was I never got anything wrong in school till the fifth grade. I never got a thing wrong. And in the fifth grade, I misspelled a word on the spelling test, and got a 95. And I started to cry. And I had my first male teacher, Mr. Newman, who said, Welcome to the human race. And after that — but he was also the first one to cast me in a play. He cast me as the Statue of Liberty. He also suggested that I'd be the one in the auditorium to read — at that time you actually read from the Bible in assembly, which you had every week — so I actually read from the Bible every week at the assembly. And that kind of fostered my love of performing. And in junior high, I was part of the ensemble cast — we got permission to do My Fair Lady while it was on Broadway. How, I never know. But we did. And

then we did Finian's Rainbow. I made the SPs, so I was only in junior high two years, which was enough, I didn't like being 13.

SM: No one does!

JB: And then in high school, I was very much involved with Sing. James Monroe had Sing, which is a very interesting concept. What it was, was an original play, written by the sophomores or juniors or the seniors. Each class wrote an original play. They cast it, they directed it, and they performed it and it was a contest. And I was part of the only time the juniors won the Sing. Every time the seniors had won it, we were the only time that the juniors won it, and it was about somebody had stolen the Monroe Mirrors, the newspaper, and who did it. We had a Mrs. Butler in the school, so of course she did.

SM: Yeah, of course.

JB: But it fostered my love. And then I went back to teach at Monroe, there were two drama teachers, Larry Fienman and Claire Massa. And Larry was in charge of the plays, and with him I directed at Monroe Wonderful Town and The King and I. And then I went off to wherever, I directed every show in every school I taught in — or subbed in — I directed the plays at all those schools.

SM: Oh, that's great. And so when you were — Oh, I just, I had a question. Um... Alright, it'll come back to me. But you mentioned like, even from the time that you were in public school, the school was integrated. Did you ever feel that there were any sort of racial or ethnic tensions between different groups at school or in the neighborhood?

JB: You know, there were, I wouldn't lie. When I was in kindergarten, this black girl named Phyllis ripped my clothes every day, because she didn't like what I was wearing. And my mother, who was very tough, went up to her and said, "If my daughter comes home, with one more ripped piece of clothing, I'm gonna get you." So that never happened again. And then when I was in junior high, we had one of the super's kids, Clarence. We were walking home from the Honeywell Avenue Library, because it was the closest library on 180 Street, and he jumped out from Crotona Park with a knife and said, "I'm gonna kill you." And we looked at him and we said, "Clarence, you can't kill." And he said, "Why?" I said, "Because it's me, Joan." And he said, "Oh, yeah, well, I'll have to wait for somebody else." But nothing, not that we really felt danger. It's not that you felt danger from anybody, or anybody really felt danger from you, but it was really the kind of thing like, "Nah, you're not gonna do this. Okay." It's not that we weren't aware of danger. Everybody was afraid of, quote, Fordham Baldies. Who knows if they ever existed. Everybody was afraid of them, whoever they were. But we really weren't. We had other gangs in the neighborhood. We had the Egyptian Crowns and other gangs but we really didn't interact with them.

SM: And would you say that became I guess more of a thing as you got older, more because of changing or?

JB: No, I don't think so. I don't think I really ever had real prejudices. Because I went to school all the time with those kind of kids. In fact, one time, with my husband — we were in Manhattan — and I saw one kid, I didn't even know what his ethnicity was, one kid stealing a bike from another kid. And I went up with my best teacher voice and I said, “Stop. Don't you move.” I said, “You with the bike? You, take off. You, I told you not to move.” My husband said, “Someday you're gonna get killed.” I said, “No, that voice, they know that voice.” I said, “They know that voice.” *Laughs*

SM: Oh yeah. I am in the five year accelerated master's program. So I'm getting my master's in education right now. But I teach fifth graders on Sundays at religious school. And yeah, I have long perfected my voice, but it also comes from being an oldest sister. So you have to know how to do it.

JB: Yeah, I'll tell you. We were not allowed — I went on to Hunter College in Manhattan — and you were not allowed to major in education at all. I majored in Speech and Drama, I minored in English, and took my education courses as my electives and came out fully certified. And my master's, my master's is in speech and theater, my master's is not in education. And I have 51 credits beyond my master's because that's how you got pay raises.

SM: Yeah, it's interesting, because at Fordham you can't take any education courses as an undergraduate either, like you can't major, minor, whatever. But you can begin taking the master's — if you get accepted to the graduate school — begin taking the master's classes a year early, so that you finish it quicker after graduation, which is, you know, a nice program that they have.

JB: That voice will do you well. It held me in good stead, even when I taught at Ramsey. It was very funny, I would approach a kid aggressively. And he would say, Don't hit me. And I'd say, Listen to me. I said, first of all, if I'm gonna lose my job, I said, because I hit you, you'll know you've been hit! *laughing* And that was it, you know, I had no discipline problems. That tone is what counts.

SM: Yeah, absolutely. And so, given those great experiences that you got to have all throughout your public school experience, would you say that students in the Bronx today have the same kind of access to those resources?

JB: No. They don't have comprehensive high schools anymore in the Bronx, which is a shame. They have all these little mini schools. Now we moved, when I finished — I finished high school and went to college for two years — when I finished high school I was 16 and in college till when I was 18 when we moved to the West side of the Bronx. So we moved to the West side of the Bronx, my sister went to Taft, she went to school on the West side. Was everything rosie? No. But you tend to remember the good better than you tend to remember the bad. And did I ever have a physical fight? Absolutely. There

was a playground on the corner of 176 and Bryant, and I went to walk to the playground, and a girl came out and said, “You're not allowed to walk on my street.” I said, “Don't tell me where to walk, I'll walk where I want to walk.” And she punched me and I pulled her hair. And we went at it and my friend's mother broke us up. But it never occurred to me not to fight. And when I taught — when I had children, I said to them, don't ever come home from school and tell me somebody stole your money, unless you come home black and blue from fighting back, because next time they'll go to somebody else. I think that's something you learned in the Bronx. You learned how to be tough, and how to protect yourself. And even here in North Carolina, I found people who were from the Bronx. Which is just kind of interesting because there are people from the Bronx all over. The Bronx does not leave people. It's that old saying, you can take the girl out of the Bronx, you cannot take the Bronx out of the girl.

SM: Yeah, absolutely. I've found that to be true. I've especially enjoyed — I did over the summer when I was doing the original thesis research, I went down to Florida, of course. My grandparents, also from the Bronx, they live in West Palm Beach now. But there's a group of guys that live in, in and around Delray Beach down there. And they didn't know each other when they lived in the Bronx, but they all lived on Pelham Parkway. And they have since all become friends living down there because of their shared growing up experiences. And so I had the opportunity to have breakfast with about 12 of them, and they, you know, are all raucous telling me all their tales. But it was really, I guess, a great example of how something that could have happened, you know, so long ago in a place that they've since left has been really still so impactful.

JB: Because we all had common experiences. We really did. The Bronx, I always said, was the biggest small place in the world. Everybody, you know, who's from the Bronx, knows somebody that you know. It's like the Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon, you know, it's that kind of thing in the Bronx. It really is. I found that the Bronx was a good learning experience. It kept you in good stead for your entire life. Nobody — I don't know. Let's put it like this, nobody really steps on people who are from the Bronx, because they'll be just as assertive — I don't want to say aggressive but assertive — as they need to be to protect themselves.

SM: No, I agree. And so did you feel like growing up as a woman during this period that people had different expectations of you than your male peers?

JB: First of all, I think that if I had had a brother, he would have been the one that they would have allowed to go to college. But since I didn't have a brother, and since I was only 16 when I graduated from high school, I was going to go to college. That's the way it was going to be. And yes, and if you were a smart woman, you became a teacher or a nurse. That's it. There weren't very many opportunities. My husband, who's from Parkchester, he says that in his graduating class at NYU in 1963, there were three women in the business department. So women were not encouraged at all to do anything except to be a teacher or a nurse. And if you didn't go to college, to be a secretary. You know, that was just the way it was. You know, it just was not pushed. My mother pushed. My father said to her once, All my

friends say that I'm stupid for allowing Joan to go to college, because she's just going to get married anyway. And my mother said to him, I don't care. She's going to college. She's 16 years old, Willie, what do you think she's going to do?

SM: That's wonderful. And so did you — were you kind of aware at the time of that, you know, there was I guess a difference, or was it something that you thought of as you got older?

JB: Nobody considered anything else. You didn't consider — as a woman — you didn't consider doing anything else. It was so rare for somebody to do something else besides teach. And that, to me, is very interesting, because very, very smart women went into teaching. And so when they imparted their knowledge to the kids, it was the smartest women who did that. I don't know if I can say that today.

SM: I agree with you.

JB: Because women have so many more opportunities today. They can choose from a myriad of things. And because the way the rules are today in teaching, I don't know how many people — they don't last. That's what we're discovering down here. That they're trying to do all kinds of incentives to get teachers to last.

SM: And so were you teaching during the 1967/1968 teachers strikes?

JB: I was part of the 1967 teachers strike. They sent me and my friend Marilyn to the elementary school to picket early in the morning because they were afraid those teachers were the weak link, because they felt that they were back the mothers of the children. And so we formed a picket line before they got there, so they wouldn't cross the picket line. So yes, I was part of that original strike. Now you have to remember, when I started teaching in February of 1964, I was earning \$5,300 a year. After I got my master's, I had my masters at 22, I was earning \$8,500 a year. That was a big tremendous jump, you know, to have your master's degree. And what's interesting, in order to teach at that time, you got what was called a provisional certificate until you got your master's. You couldn't get a real license, a permanent license, until you had your master's. And New York City had its own tests, you know, for master's. And my oral question was, What would you do if a kid didn't get the starring part in your play, and she had taken private drum lessons. And the Bronx in me came right out. I said to the panel of three, I said, "I'm gonna answer that question in four words." I said, "I am the teacher." So I went back to school, and I said, either I got a very high mark, or I failed. And I got a very high mark. That was, you know, that was the Bronx coming out. Like, don't tell me I can't give advice to the mother of an 18 year old. That kind of thing.

SM: Yeah. And so, you know, just to go back to the strike quickly, what — do you remember, I guess, the way that people were talking about it at the time?

JB: Yeah. The strike lasted three weeks, which was a very long time, the '67 strike. And we were told that we were going to be docked the three weeks pay if we didn't go back in and we still did not go back in. And the only people who crossed the picket lines were a couple of the brand new teachers who were afraid that they would lose their jobs if they stayed out there, even though we called them on the phone. We did. We called them on the phone and said, You're not gonna lose your job if you stay out there. They need you. They reported, well they reported me to the principal, saying I was intimidating, because I said, "Don't cross that picket." I said, "We have very long memories." I said, "Don't cross the picket line. These people are going to be your colleagues. Don't do that." So they reported me as being intimidating. But the truth was, nobody sat with them. Nobody ate with them. Till the, I would say, till the following September. You know, it was a tough time because it was very scary to go on strike for the first time. After that, it wasn't scary. *Laughs*

SM: After that, you got it in your bones, you're ready to roll. And so yeah, I guess, tell me a little bit more about your time teaching at James Monroe. Was it very different even in the four years since you left?

JB: No, it really wasn't. I said to them immediately. I said, just let me tell you, I graduated from this school. There's nothing that you can tell me that I don't know already. The thing, ethnically, it was different in the four years. It became much more minority in the four years, because people moved away. And I had to laugh. For the first — I wrote a book, it's called, *Unless You Were There, You Wouldn't Believe It*. I changed all the names to protect the guilty. I said, you know who you are, and that's enough. And the first fifth of it is about teaching at Monroe. Some of the things were like, I took kids to the World's Fair in 1964. And the guy kept saying at the World's Fair, "Where's the teacher?" And I kept saying, "I am the teacher," and they said, "No, the teacher." I said, "I am the teacher!" *Laughs* Because I took, I had a senior homeroom, so they were 18 and I was 20. It's a good thing I only knew that, they didn't know that. And teaching in the Bronx was a wonderful experience for the rest of my career, because you learned how to handle all kinds of situations, and you had no recourse. In other words, there were no intercoms in the room. There were no phones in the room. If something happened in your classroom, you better handle it. I had a kid who jumped up and started beating up a kid in the back of the room. I took the yardstick and started beating him on the back. And they separated and that was it. But there was nobody to call for help. I had a kid once follow a girl. And he tried to get in my classroom and I held the door. And he was, and he said to me, "I wish you were a man, because if you were a man, this would be your face." And I took my hands and threw them against him and got him out of the room and held the door as he was kicking it. And I said to the kids, "Big help you are." And they said, "Well, if he really would've hit you, then we would have helped you." But you had to handle every situation yourself. There was nobody to call for help. And so later on when I taught at Spring Valley, which is also very ethnically diverse, I had no problems. I just knew right away, one class, a girl came up to me and she said, "I just want to tell you, I represent this class and we're not gonna take any shit from you." I said, "Let me tell you something." I said, "You're gonna take all the shit I dish out. I'm the teacher." She turned around the other kids and said, "She's okay." So that's what

you learned in the Bronx, you handled the situation yourself. You didn't go off crying, you didn't go off to your supervisor, you learned to handle it.

SM: And it seems that that definitely gained you a level of respect from the students themselves.

JB: Yes. Because you didn't — first of all, you don't back down. That's the first thing you learned in the Bronx, you don't back down. If you say it's the rule, it's the rule, and you be consistent. Growing up in the Bronx taught me a lot.

SM: Yeah. It seems like it. And so going back a little bit. Totally different thing. Tell me a little bit about Jewish life growing up. So you mentioned, you know, you mentioned your family didn't keep kosher. Were they religious?

JB: I'm gonna say we were cultural Jews. We kept Passover. We changed dishes. We did everything for Passover. We kept Hanukkah, we kept Passover. I went to school on Sundays, to learn about the Jewish holidays, the Jewish history, and everything like that. That we did. I was not bat mitzvah'd. None of the girls were bat mitzvah'd back then. But you did get a Jewish education. That was important. And you kept the holidays. Like, for example, we were never able to celebrate Halloween.

SM: Really?

JB: Nobody ever celebrated Halloween. And the reason was, that was the night of the pogroms in Europe. So nobody ever celebrated Halloween. I don't remember ever. My kids celebrated Halloween because it became a, you know, secular holiday. But no, we never dressed up. If you wanted to get dressed up, you got dressed up for Purim. You know, that kind of thing. But we were never particularly — my grandmother went to temple, so we would visit her on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We would go in and visit grandma, but we wouldn't stay very long.

SM: Did you grow up speaking any languages besides English in the house?

JB: My parents spoke Yiddish. They didn't speak Yiddish to each other until they didn't want us to understand when they spoke Yiddish, because they were born here. So interestingly enough, I can still do, I can do words and phrases and things like that, but I can't speak in full sentences. Except my grandmother always used to say that she spoke Chinese because she could say, "*gay kachen afen yahm*," go shit in the river. *Laughs*

SM: Oh, lord, that's wonderful. But that's a key phrase if you're ever in China.

JB: That's so funny. But, you know, no. But, you know, it's funny because, taking Spanish since the seventh grade, I still speak it. I've gone through South America, I've gone through, you know, Mexico, I've gone through many Spanish speaking countries using my Spanish.

SM: Yeah. No, that's great. I speak Spanish as well. And it's incredibly helpful. And especially living in the Bronx now. You know, it's like the area I live off of Arthur Avenue, which is still very Italian in its businesses, but not so much in the people that live there. So, you know, when I went to get milk from the bodega, at the corner store, the other day, I was like, you know, speaking in Spanish, because that's just how it goes.

JB: And people appreciate that.

SM: Absolutely. Well, and that's the thing. It's like, because this is where all the Fordham kids live, I know they speak English, but it's like, why am I going to make them if I don't have to.

JB: I always tell people that I speak Spanish. When I introduce myself, I say I speak Spanish, but I speak solely in the present tense. And please speak very slowly. I said, I can understand in the past, but to speak, I speak in the present.

SM: Yeah, that's so funny, because I have a friend from home whose mom is a speech pathologist, and she is Jewish from Brooklyn, but she speaks some Spanish, but she said the exact same thing as she only does the present tense.

JB: It makes it easy. Yeah. I've managed in Cuba, when we went to Cuba I managed. I've managed all over.

SM: Yeah. And so when did you decide to leave the Bronx?

JB: I did not leave the Bronx until I got married. Neither did my husband. When we got married we decided that we were going to move up. So we moved to Forest Hills, in Queens, and we lived there for two and a half years. And I banked my salary for the two and a half years, and we bought a house. In 1967, we bought a house. I was, when we closed on the house, I was like six months pregnant. And the interesting thing was she was supposed to leave teaching after your third month, but we needed that paycheck and you do not get paid for the summer, unless you finished the whole semester. So if you worked the whole semester, you got paid for July. You work the other whole semester, you got paid for August. So I stayed until six weeks before I gave birth.

SM: Wow. And so how did you feel about leaving the Bronx at the time?

JB: You know, you never left it, because I was still teaching at James Monroe. I was still going to my mother's apartment every Friday after work, so you really didn't leave it. You know, you just — everybody who lived in Forest Hills was from the Bronx, so it didn't really matter. You didn't really leave it. You didn't leave it in Rockland County. You didn't leave it when you went to Queens. And here in North Carolina, it's very funny. They have a club called the Long Island Lolitas, so many women are from Long Island that they have their own club.

SM: Wow. That's funny. Yeah, I can imagine in Rockland that there were quite a few fellow Bronxites to spend your time with. And so did you — you know, I guess when you were at James Monroe, or at the same time that you were leaving — were a lot of other people talking about getting out of the Bronx?

JB: We were one of the last families to leave. We left when my parents recognized kids were giving themselves shots of heroin on the corner. That's when we left. Many of the families left. All my old friends left before us. We were the last ones. I had to make new friends when I entered James Monroe, because they had all left after junior high.

SM: Okay. Yeah. And so, when you think back about the Bronx today, what kind of emotions and sentiments do you associate with it?

JB: Before we moved to North Carolina, almost three years ago, we went back to the Bronx. And we've been back to all our old neighborhoods. Now my apartment building has been gone a long time, both apartment buildings have been gone a long time. My friend Anita's apartment building is still there. My friend Geraldine's apartment building is still there. Mine's gone, but all of theirs is still there. And, of course, we went to Parkchester to see where my husband lived. That's still all there, that's still beautifully kept and everything, it really is lovely. And then we went past his junior high, went back to my junior high, my high school. My elementary school's closed, the junior high still functions and so does the high school as five little schools. So I went to a reunion there back in 2001, I think was the last time I was there. And it was funny. I said, "I have to go to the bathroom." And she said, "Well, I'll show you where it is." I said, "You don't have to show me." I said, "I know where it is. But tell me, when I come back, are we meeting in the boys' gym or the girls' gym?" And she goes, "We don't have any boy's gym or girls' gym?" I said, "Ohhhh, yeah. On the second floor or the third floor, which gym are we meeting in?" *Laughs* So she goes, "You really had it like that?" I said, "Oh, yes. We never did anything together."

SM: Yeah. Did you go back after you all moved to Rockland? Were you going back consistently kind of through the years?

JB: Well, I did. I went back, especially since I was pregnant, and I went back to bring the baby. Of course, I went back. I went back — I still remain friends with some of some of the teachers I had, plus faculty, you know, so both you were in both realms. And so it was kind of, it was interesting. But that

was the last time I went back, in 2001 was the last time I went to Monroe, actually. And I went as faculty, I did not go as, you know, as a student. And, listen, I went bowling. I joined a bowling team in Rockland County. And two women came up to me and said to me, "You look very familiar." I said, "Would you happen to be from the Bronx?" They said yes. I said, "Did you go to James Monroe?" They said yes. I said, "What year did you graduate?" They said 1964. I said, "I was a teacher." They said to me, "How old are you?" I said 27. They said, "But we're 25?" I said, "Yes, I know." *Laughs*

SM: So I guess before I end the recording, is there anything that you want to add that you think we haven't touched on or anything?

JB: I think that what was kind of interesting for my graduating class, which had the first non-white president of the graduating class. It was Tommy Yi, he was Asian. That was the first time there was a non-white elected president of the senior class. So I thought that was interesting. And that was back in 1960. So that was, you know, a long time ago that that happened. And that goes to show, to me, that the ethnicity didn't count, the person counted. And I thought that was kind of interesting in terms of — and he still runs to the reunions. But now, all the reunions are in Boca. *Laughs*

SM: *Laughs* Exactly like I was saying, shocking, I know.

JB: And that's about it.

SM: Well, that's wonderful. Thank you so much. I'm gonna end the recording.