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**Stern, Mark**

Sophia Maier Garcia

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Transcriber: Reyna Stovall

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

Mark Stern (MS): Yeah, well, some of this, I've already told you my email, but I guess —

SM: Yeah, just say it. So we have it. Yeah.

MS: My father was born in Frankfurt, Germany. And I have some pictures, you may have seen them if you read that article that he wrote, this was him as a boy. \*Refers to pictures\*

SM: Yeah.

MS: And like, you could get those from that article. But if there's any you don't have I could scan for you.

SM: Okay, great.

MS: And, of course, they had to leave Germany, because of the Nazis. And they escaped through the Black Forest, on foot, sometimes by train. And, of course, they were hidden by people who were taking a big risk. And they made it to Antwerp, Belgium. And I'm not exactly sure why they felt it wasn't safe to stay there, but they moved on to Brussels. So in 2016, I made a trip — it was the first time I've been anywhere in Europe — with my family, and we retraced the steps. We retraced through the car, and I like to joke that we retraced it, but we weren't running, which is kind of a bad joke, but it was obviously much more relaxed than when you're escaping. But it was still interesting to see some of the same places he had been. I was trying to find out where his father — this is Herbert Stern, my middle name is named after him — I was trying to find out where he lived. But we only got as far as that there were two Herbert Sterns. We went through both places, and I wasn't sure which it was.

SM: Yeah.

MS: And I understand that like 40% of the town had been destroyed during the war. So it might not even have been the same building. But it was still interesting to be in the same place. And then in Brussels, the Nazis invaded Belgium and took both his parents. So his father never came back. But his mother and he were reunited. And they came over in '48 with her sister. And I was never as close with his parents, with his mother, a survivor, as I was with my mother's parents. And then eventually, they moved to Arizona, and they kept in touch by letters. But I never saw her again after that. So this was actually – I

don't think you've seen this one. This was my grandmother older, you might have seen a picture of her younger. And this is their wedding picture.

SM: Wow.

MS: That she remarried this guy who was from Poland, his name was Gus. And this was in their apartment in the Bronx when I knew them. This one you've probably seen. That's her with my father.

SM: Yeah.

MS: And this might have been still in Germany, before they left. And then this moves into my mother's family. So to talk about her a little bit, I think that it's interesting to note that her father was from Turkey. But that family had emigrated there 500 years earlier from Spain, during the Inquisition. So I guess you could say they were a mixed family because you have the Sephardic and the Ashkenazi. And he still spoke some kind of Spanish. Somebody told me it's called Ladino.

SM: Yes.

MS: But to me, it sounded like Spanish. Once he moved to New York, he changed the way he spoke to match those around him. So he got involved in the laundry business. Previously, my grandmother's family had owned a bakery. That was down when she lived on Warner Street. And she used to tell me a story that her mother would get up at five in the morning and have a glass of beer and then go bake the bread for the day. And unfortunately, the sons didn't continue that business. They were competing with Pecters, which was a famous bakery that their son did go into the business. And so for some reason, later on the sons wound up in the laundry business. And when my grandfather married her, he also got into the laundry business, so he owned a place in Clason Point, which is the East Bronx. And I remember as a kid I used to go to the laundromat — not a laundromat, but it was a big industrial building. And I would throw rocks into the water at the end of that street. And I tried to find where it is, but I haven't been too successful. A lot of the streets have changed, but that was interesting to go in the laundry and they lived on Morris Avenue. I was very close with them. I used to stay there a lot when I was a kid. And so his name was Mark and I'm named after him. Which is unusual for Jews to name after the living.

SM: Yeah, well not for Sephardic Jews.

MS: Oh, really?

SM: They name after the living, yeah.

MS: Okay, I didn't know that.

SM: Yeah, Ashkenazi Jews, they name after the dead but Sephardic Jews name after the living. So that's probably —

MS: Her name was Rose. This is my mother. Her name was Gladys. And that's her with her father. And this is them when they were older, it says '46. And this is my grandfather. On the roof. It was very common back then to go up on a roof to get some air. I don't know if people still do that. Sometimes they're locked, which is not safe. You can see, he was kind of a dapper man.

SM: Yeah, it looks like it. And so did you grow up in both of those sorts of influences, the Sephardic and Ashkenazi influences from your grandparents?

MS: Well, I guess you could say that my grandmother was also Ashkenazi. As well as my father's parents. So I was like three quarters Ashkenazi. Yeah, I would say that the Sephardic influence was pretty great in terms of the food. Like he liked this dish called bourekas. And only recently, I've noticed that there's some similarity with the borek, which is Eastern European.

SM: Okay, yeah.

MS: They're all bread that is stuffed with spinach and cheese. So there's a lot of cross-cultural influences there. I wouldn't say that either of them were particularly religious, but a lot of the Jewish stuff is cultural too.

SM: Yeah. Absolutely. And so were your parents living in the Bronx when you were born?

MS: Yes. They were married in 1960. Let's see if I can find that. Somewhere is a wedding picture, I have a big one at home. This is my uncle Norman. And this looks like a wedding picture of my mother's parents. I don't really know how I wound up with a lot of these. I guess they were my mother's and then when she died I inherited them. This is the three siblings as kids, my mother is the youngest. And this is Arlene and Norman. And there she is on the roof again.

SM: And did she grow up in the Bronx or in lower Manhattan?

MS: No, that happened when my grandmother, her mother, was a little girl.

SM: Oh, okay.

MS: When they moved up to the Bronx, I don't know if they moved directly to the apartment on Morris Avenue or she might have moved there after she got married. But my mother certainly lived her whole life in the Bronx. And my father, in 1948, he would have been about 15. So from then on — I think they lived at first in upper Manhattan. Because that story I gave you within that publication. He wrote that

when he attended George Washington High School, which is in Manhattan. But then after that, they moved to the Bronx. And my parents met probably in the Bronx. And this is my mother when she was maybe a teenager. I always think she looked a little bit like Marilyn Monroe.

SM: I could see it.

MS: This is me. This is like a breakfast table. This is her sitting. I don't think that's her car. She just posed for it. I could have sworn I saw one of their wedding pictures. Unless I went in the wrong drawer — here it is. I have a bigger one of this. And that was in 1960. And I was born in '61.

SM: Okay. And so what neighborhood did you grow up in?

MS: I lived — the first apartment we lived in, I have no memory of. They showed me the building. It's in the South Bronx, the west side. It's near the number four train. I could probably find that if I drove around there. And then we lived on Jerome Avenue, 1115, I think, which is the part of Jerome Avenue where the train is not there. The train splits off to River Avenue and 170. And we lived in the part without the train. And I attended PS 114 that was right across the street. And there's a nice park there too. So we lived there, actually, I'm skipping another place in between that was on the Grand Concourse. And there was another park there that I still — there's like a tree I used to play under and I still look for it when I drive by there. It was Grand Concourse, then Jerome Avenue. As I said, I attended public school there. And then my mother wanted me to go to Bronx Science. So I think we moved there. I'm not sure if I had even gotten in yet. It was kind of a risk. We lived on 197 Street not far from the reservoir. And then while I was away at college, she moved to Reservoir Avenue. And I didn't do that well at Boston University, so I moved back home and finished here at Fordham. And so that place on Reservoir Avenue, 2745, I lived in for the longest period of time of any place. I lived there 22 years.

SM: Yeah. Okay. So, I mean, it depends on which place you'd like to talk about. But what was — at least when you were living in the southernmost areas on Jerome Avenue or the Grand Concourse. What was the neighborhood like? What kind of shops and amenities were there? Was it a predominantly Jewish area?

MS: It was very mixed. I understand that the period of time that you're studying, it was like, almost half Jewish, and then people started to leave. So I remember having a lot of friends of all different ethnicities, and we would shop on 167 Street and Jerome, which is that far to walk. And I guess I felt pretty safe as a kid. Eventually we, like I said, we moved up to the Kingsbridge area. And that was also pretty nice. I think that it started to become a little bit more dangerous later in my life. And, in fact, once I was mugged in my building, so that was kind of an impetus to move out. But I always felt a little bit sad, because I felt like I have a connection to the Bronx, and I still am involved with organizations like this one called the Bronx Council of Environmental Quality, or BCQ, and I'm on the education committee and all that. So I still come down to the Bronx a lot.

SM: And so what kind of things would you like to do for fun, either when you were a younger kid or when you were a teenager?

MS: Well, later on in life, I started becoming interested in hiking. I'm not too sure how much I did of that as a kid. I guess I played a little baseball; I wasn't very good. I'm more of a baseball fan. But, you know, we kind of played the usual street games, outdoors. And I didn't really have a whole lot of friends, but I had a few really close friends. There were three of us that people would refer to as the Three Musketeers. We were always together. One of them, David Keiths, he moved to Los Angeles, so I don't really see him much. And the other Chris Rogers, he's a trumpet player and he's still in the city.

SM: Yeah. Oh, great.

MS: I've gone to see him perform, but I hadn't seen him in a long time. And then when I went to see him, that might have been the first time in like, 30 years or more — 40 years.

SM: Do you ever remember any sort of ethnic or racial tensions in the neighborhood growing up or in school?

MS: Not really. I don't remember really any antisemitism that I could recall. Not directly or personally on me. I'd heard some stories about it happening. But I thought that we really got along pretty well.

SM: Yeah. And so, a little more about food. Besides, as you were talking about some of the Sephardic influences, what kind of things would you like to eat?

MS: Well, I guess my grandmother was pretty kosher. I'm not. I don't think my mother really was. I guess, really there were some foods that my grandmother made that were more ethnic Jewish foods. She would make like a spinach pie that was very good.

SM: And so, a little more, how about music. What kind of music would you like to listen to? Was that a big influence on you as a child?

MS: I would think that the biggest influence on me was my father. He liked rock, rock and roll. And I still have some of his albums. Unfortunately, albums get scratched. I started replacing them with the CD version. And now those are becoming outdated. But his favorite bands were like the Moody Blues, Procol Harum, and of course the Beatles and The Stones. But I still like some of that music.

SM: Did either of your parents have any college education?

MS: Well, my father was an accountant. I don't think that he graduated college. That's a good question. I'm not sure how he learned to do bookkeeping. But he never, unfortunately, became a CPA. He tried, but he couldn't pass the test. So he worked for a CPA. And he did the books, mostly in bars and restaurants in the Bronx. So what was nice about that was as a fringe benefit would be that we'd get a free lunch when he did the books. And my mother also did not attend college. She had some kind of office job as a young person. And then later in life, she got into market research, which she would mostly do on the phone. And I did that for one year, and I decided it was not for me. People would often hang up on you.

SM: Yeah, no. I can imagine on the phone. It is probably the most difficult of —

MS: It's not quite as bad as selling things. Unless you're — some people are good salespeople, but it's similar because you have to get their attention.

SM: Yeah. Did she work while you were at home or did she stay at home?

MS: Not early. But later on she did. I don't know if she had done market research earlier or if that was the first time she did it. But her sister was already doing that and then helped get her the job, so that she could do it from home, which was good because that she could keep an eye on me, if she was on the phone. Other times, she would go down to the office, Crossly Surveys. They had an office in the 50s on the East side.

SM: And so, a little bit about school. Are there any memories from public school or junior high school that stand out to you?

MS: Well, I didn't really like — public school was fine. I had some good teachers. There was one teacher we had, Mrs. Rosen, who I had no problem with her, but she was kind of strict. And I remember Chris, one of the friends I mentioned earlier, had kind of a conflict with her where it was like a fire drill or something and she had to line us up. And she told him to shut up or something like that. And then he spoke back to her and said you shut up. I don't know why that sticks in my mind. But I think, you know, later on becoming a teacher, I kind of understood that side of it, that it's really very difficult to keep kids orderly. But I think you can also go too far. So I was more like a non-confrontational kind of teacher. Which means that the kids liked me but they didn't really listen to me that well. So that was a bit of a problem. You can be too soft also. And then junior high I didn't like. We used to refer to it as the prison. And it looked a little bit like a prison. It was Tetard, which is also known as 143. That's on Sedgwick Avenue. And I think that I did experience a little bit of bullying there. But I don't think it had anything to do with being Jewish. It's just that I wasn't a particularly tough kid. And my friend Richard, he got more of it. But I experienced some of that. And then going to Bronx Science, it was really a relief, because I liked it there. And, in fact, in some ways, I look back on that more fondly than my college years. I really liked Bronx science. I mean, it was difficult. But there were certain good things about being there. But I

was only there for three years, because in junior high, I was in the SP program, so I skipped eighth grade. And it was a little weird, because they were phasing out the program at that time. So instead of being an SP class in ninth grade, they just put us all to a regular ninth grade class. So we wound up missing some subjects like Earth Science. Later on, I wound up teaching Earth Science even though I never had [taken it]. So I had to learn it as I went and try and keep a step ahead while teaching.

SM: Yeah. I wonder — I haven't looked to see when they ended the SP program. I'm interested.

MS: It would have been probably like the late 70s.

SM: Yeah. Okay. Yeah a lot of —

MS: I graduated Bronx Science in '78.

SM: Okay. And so did you feel like you got a high quality education at Bronx Science?

MS: Yeah, I think that even some of the non-science subjects were very good. In fact, some of my friends who went there, and they traveled quite a distance to go there, were not science people. So they were more interested in English and History. And I think it was a pretty well rounded education there.

SM: And was Bronx Science still predominantly Jewish at the time? Or was it kind of —

MS: Yes, it was probably more than half. I've noticed, since then, it shifted more to Asian.

SM: Yeah.

MS: So there's still like a good number of Jews. And of course, they don't all come from the Bronx, they travel there. But I think the Asians now outnumber the Jews. My wife happens to be from Taiwan. So we're a mixed family.

SM: Do you remember at all — I guess you would have been in public school at the time — but do you remember anything from the 1967/68 Teachers strike?

MS: As a student?

SM: As a student, yeah.

MS: Yeah, I remember just not doing anything, like we would go to school, and they would sit us in the cafeteria all day. Lunch was only part of that, but you were just there. So that was kind of a drag. But I, you know, being a teacher later on, I understand — I respect the means of strike. Sometimes that's the



only way you get what you're asking for. I never really had to strike. But I think we came close a few times and then they settled.

SM: Do you feel like growing up as a man during this period, you had different expectations from your female, like peers or in school or family members, things like that?

MS: You mean, because of being Jewish?

SM: No. Just in general, you know, I've talked a lot with women about like they were expected to get married, not to get jobs necessarily, anything like that.

MS: Yeah, I guess there was some pressure on me. Well, it wasn't really my parents decision, but I wanted to be a doctor. And that was kind of like the ideal, either doctor or a lawyer. And I remember as a kid, people used to tell me I would make a good lawyer because I liked to argue. But it wasn't really something that interested me. I was more into biology. But I guess my grades suffered a lot when my dad died. We're pretty sure that he killed himself. I mean, he obviously had a hard childhood. Even when they thought they were safe in Belgium, there were bombings. And then later on, he was fine for many years. but I think the next experience that affected him was when he was in the army in the US. Now, fortunately he didn't see combat. But they were doing some kind of testing bombing, and that brought back memories. And he had some kind of breakdown, and they gave him shock treatments, which were kind of experimental and now I heard recently that they're using it again, but in a more limited fashion and that it does really help some people. But I think back then that it might have done more harm than good. But after that, he was, again, fine for many years. And then he started to have breakdowns again. And there was one time when he would talk about imagining himself as Jesus on the cross. And to me, what that means is, or what inspired that was, he was confused about his identity, because during the war, he had been hidden by a Christian family. And I think that had something to do with that. His psychiatrist told us that he should not live with us, and so he got an apartment separately. But I always disagreed with that, because I never felt that he was a danger to us at all. If anything what had wound up happening is that he harmed himself. So I thought that was a mistake. I thought that would not have happened, had he been living with us. And he fell from his window. We imagined he jumped, we don't know, because nobody was there. And I thought that it was kind of bad that my mother's family would say to me things like, "This was for the best." And I certainly didn't feel that way.

SM: Of course not.

MS: I always felt like I had been lacking in some way, that if I had talked to him more — you know, kids have these thoughts. I don't know if I could have made any difference, but I had felt that way then. But I like to think about the better times that I had with him because we used to ride our bikes together. He was a big biking enthusiast. He used to go all the way down to Manhattan. \*Refers to picture\* Here he is on his bike.

SM: Oh, wow.

MS: He was kind of silly too. And I take after him like that. So you know, I – we had a lot of good years that I like to think about more than how he went. And then after that, my mother kind of fixated on me. I became her whole life and I think she was too domineering, like controlling, and always wanting to know everything about me. And then finally, later in life, she started to go down to Florida. She was what they call a snowbird. She'd go back and forth. And then finally, she decided that the traveling was too much for her and she stayed down there. And I kind of regretted that because I didn't see her that much. I was never a big phone person. And so we would get into a lot of arguments on the phone. I always felt that when we were together, we got along fine. And it was just not feasible. Like I would go down there sometimes, she would come to New York. She kept an apartment on Broadway across from Van Cortlandt Park. She let me stay in the apartment on Reservoir Avenue. So I kind of took that over and she wasn't liking the neighborhood, and then she wanted to move anyway. And she got that studio. And that's where she would stay when she came up from Florida. But then she had broken her hip previously and then she broke the other hip on one of her visits. And then that's when she decided she was done. So, she stayed down there. And in fact, I still own her place near Fort Lauderdale, but I don't use it. I'm waiting for my wife to retire so we can spend more time down there.

SM: Yeah, my grandparents live in Florida, of course.

MS: Full time?

SM: Yeah, they're down there. They've been down there for, I mean, all of my life. They've moved different places in Florida, but now they're in West Palm, in that area, because I have cousins and things that live down there.

MS: My aunt, this was Norman's wife, and my aunt and uncle. They would sometimes stay at West Palm, but they never bought down there. They would rent it and stay in a different place.

SM: Okay, yeah, they're in one of the, you know, communities for older people, whatever, 55 plus. They've got a nice little apartment.

MS: Yeah that's where she was, in Sunrise.

SM: And so, let's see, let's go back a little bit about Jewish life. So was your family religious? Did you attend synagogue?

MS: Not often, but I was Bar Mitzvah. And that was sort of an ordeal. I mean, first, I remember going to Hebrew school. And I got kicked out of Hebrew school.

SM: Why?

MS: Which, looking back on it, is kind of embarrassing. For talking. And that came back to haunt me later on because that was my biggest problem with my students. I could not get them to stop talking. And you can't teach that way. While I was teaching, they would be talking. So after that, my mother had me go to a rabbi as like a private tutor. And I completed my studies and actually sang the parts I had to sing and I was probably so nervous. I don't think I slept much the night before. But after that was over, I remember the party was good.

SM: Yeah. And so, you mentioned your grandmother was kosher. But did you grow up in a kosher house? Or —

MS: Not really, my mother didn't really follow all of those things. And I don't. My own Judaism is very strange, I pick and choose what I want to believe. And so I'm not kosher but I do light the candles for Hanukkah. For some reason that's important to me. And I eat matzah for Passover. So there's a few things that I keep that tradition going. But I actually would like to go back to synagogue and one of the things I thought about was going for Rosh Hashannah. But of course everybody wants to go to then, so you have to — you need to buy tickets now. And I kind of regret that I never took my kids to see that. But you know, to be honest, at least by Conservative Jews or Orthodox, they're not considered Jewish, because their mother isn't. So I have this crazy idea that I want my son to marry a Jewish girl.

SM: And bring it back.

MS: Because then if she's Jewish, then his kids will be Jewish. But I don't know how he feels about that. He doesn't have a girlfriend yet.

SM: Yeah, well, by Jewish law, I would not be Jewish either. Because my father is Jewish.

MS: Not your mother?

SM: No, although my mother does come from a Sephardic background, but nobody has been Jewish in her family for —

MS: Did they convert?

SM: Yeah. Well, to Christianity. Yeah. So they've been Catholic for a couple of generations. But we were —

MS: But you do say that they have Jewish roots going way back.

SM: Oh, yeah. We've found them like it was always a bit of family lore that they used to be Jewish. But now that we have the resources, we were able to find them.

MS: That's very interesting that they went either way, that they decided to convert and my ancestors left.

SM: Yeah, well, that was the thing they were living — so my mother's Puerto Rican. So they were still living under Spanish rule. So it would have been very difficult to have maintained their Judaism.

MS: In Puerto Rico, I would think so. Although my ancestors did, secretly.

SM: Yeah.

MS: From what my grandfather tells me, they used to go down to the basement to have services. They changed their name from Cohen, which is like the priest class, to Quain, which, I don't know, to me that sounds Irish.

SM: Yeah.

MS: Q - U - A - I - N

SM: Okay.

MS: And his father became the Bay which is like, I don't know exactly what it means. It's like an important official. He was chief of police in Smyrna, which I think might be Greece now, like one of those disputed areas.

SM: It is.

MS: And he was quite important. And then they sent him to the US to become a doctor. And that didn't quite work out. He wound up working in coat check places, like nightclubs, and then later on owned the laundry.

SM: Yeah. And so you mentioned did he end up getting kind of involved in the Hispanic community while they were here? Or he just was able to use his Spanish?

MS: He had employees who were Spanish and he was able to speak with them. I think that's good, because lots of times people have this thing about the boss, you know, who can't communicate with them, but he was friendly with his employees.

SM: That's great. So yeah, so after high school, you said that you attended Boston College or University?

MS: Boston University for a year and a half.

SM: And then you decided to come back and —

MS: I wasn't doing that. It was too much partying there. And then I moved back home. I would sometimes walk here, from Kingsbridge to here it's not that far, maybe half an hour walk, but other times take the bus.

SM: Yeah. And what was your experience like at Fordham?

MS: Well, unfortunately, as a commuting student, I didn't get that much into the student life here, and so I do sort of regret that. I remember when my daughter was considering coming here. She said she didn't want to live at home. Although she could have driven here. But she wanted to live on campus, and then wound up going to Binghamton. My experience here was good. I kind of feel like I'm reconnecting with Fordham now. There was a long time when I hardly ever came here. I like the campus, and I like some of the events that they have here now.

SM: I'm glad. And I'm glad, you know, all of this is here now. I think it's really, really great. And so how long did you stay in the Bronx after you finished college?

MS: Well, like I said, on Reservoir Avenue we lived there for 22 years. So I really lived in the Bronx all my life until 2002. And then we moved up to Dobbs Ferry.

SM: And so you said you were teaching? Were you teaching in the Bronx during that time?

MS: Yes. First, I taught at Walton High School, which was only two blocks from where I lived. Which is both good and bad. It was very convenient, but some of the students knew where I lived. Fortunately they didn't really follow me home or anything. It was a little bit weird. And then they started doing something in the Bronx to large schools, where they split them up into small schools. And I did not like that. You had to interview for a job in the small school, which was weird, because I already had a job. So I, in the last year that they had what was called a seniority transfer, I transferred to DeWitt Clinton. And then, skipping ahead many years, they did the same thing there. For a long time, they resisted it. They have a pretty strong alumni there, and they didn't want that. But eventually, they couldn't stop it. And at that time, when they wanted to do the same thing, I had the interview for my own job. I just retired, because I was close enough. I was 54, and I had a bank of sick days, I just used that. I had signed

up for the 55 25 plan. And I just retired and a lot of people tell me, “Why would you retire that early?” Because I could.

SM: Yeah why not?

MS: It was too much stress, like, apart from the students we also had stress from the administration, because they were trying to get rid of us to hire younger teachers at a lower salary. So they would come in and purposely give us bad observations no matter how good the lesson was, and I just had enough of that so I left.

SM: And what was your experience like with the students in your time at Clinton, was it — what were the demographics like when you were there?

MS: Largely Black, Spanish, there was a shift from Puerto Rican to Dominican.

SM: Yeah, okay.

MS: And I pretty much got along with them. Like I said, because I didn't stress them. Some of the teachers who were a little too strict, I think they got into more conflicts. But one thing I don't understand is — I watched one of these things that Fordham ran about James Baldwin, who happened to go to DeWitt Clinton — and he said something about why Blacks hate Jews.

SM: Yes, I read that.

MS: And it upset me so much. I do understand his perspective. He felt that Jews being white, by and large, could assimilate. And they couldn't, because they would always be identified as Black and looked down upon. But I think that that overlooks a lot of the shared history. Like, first of all, we were both slaves at one time. And the Jews were very heavily involved in the Civil Rights Movement. So I kind of felt bad about that. But I would have liked to have met him and had a conversation with him. But he died a while ago. And I'm also a big fan of his writing.

SM: Yeah, I've read a few of his things as well. And I've read that particular piece. He had a lot of interesting things to say about that. How would you reflect on your time teaching? Would you say it was similar to the experiences that you had growing up or they didn't have the same access to resources and things that you did?

MS: I think that I really taught more the way I was taught than I did anything I learned in education classes, those classes were really not very useful. And I think that being at Bronx Science, we did have better resources like the lab equipment. So yes, it was a little bit frustrating to go into a lab and have to piece together setups, like you have to do it in groups like not every individual could have it. But

even doing it in groups, it sometimes became hard to get the materials. They did a lot of what we call paper labs, which weren't really labs, because they were just busy work. But I think that there was a period of time when Clinton was considered to be quite a good school. And when I first got there, it was still like that. And I think the quality sort of went down after that, but I can't really put my finger on why or what happened.

SM: And so what eventually made you all decide to leave the Bronx and move up to Dobbs Ferry?

MS: Well, we had been thinking it would be nice to have a house because we were planning on having kids. And actually, our daughter was born and lived in the Bronx for three years. She doesn't remember it. But like I said, the last straw was getting mugged in my own building and after that happened, I kind of looked harder. And most of the time, for some reason, we were looking in Yonkers, maybe because my aunts and uncles lived there and I was familiar with it. Like when I was a kid we used to go out there and think of that as the country. Before we were saying how the Bronx seemed like the country and people would move up from Manhattan, then the same with Westchester. So every time we got close to buying we heard bad things about the school system in Yonkers. But we kind of lucked into the place in Dobbs Ferry. A lot of times we bid on houses and were outbid and this time, the couple that owned the house liked us, and — even though someone else offered higher — they took our offer, which is unheard of. And we liked it. It was a small house. The upstairs was only one room, like it used to be an attic I guess. So later on, we expanded it because we had a boy and a girl and they couldn't really stay together. But now we're experiencing the empty nest syndrome. And I'm hoping that my daughter moves back, even if it's briefly, from California and then decides where she wants to work long term.

SM: That will be — my sister is graduating from high school this year, so that will be finally for my parents the final push towards that.

MS: And my son is interested in computers so of course he's not sure where he wants to go.

SM: Yeah, he could work anywhere though, with that stuff. He could probably work online and he's got time. And so how did you feel about leaving the Bronx at that time? I mean, I know it was a like a safety thing, but —

MS: I have mixed feelings. Because I do like Dobbs Ferry very much, especially that you can drive for like 10 minutes and be at the river. I love the river, the Hudson, but I do miss certain things about the Bronx, like I used to like Van Cortland Park a lot. And I've returned there a few times. You know, they say the Bronx is the borough of parks. So there's a lot of nice things. I mean, for a long time, I think people had a negative view of the Bronx of being dangerous, polluted. But I think that things are improving. One thing I liked is how they restored the Highbridge, you can walk to Manhattan from there.

SM: And were you aware when you were living in the Bronx in the 70s and 80s, about the devastation that was going on in the southern parts of the Bronx and the fires and things?

MS: Yeah, there was that famous Yankee game where they said “The Bronx is burning.” I think they made a book based on just that quote. So they actually showed buildings nearby that were burning. That was an upsetting period of time, but I think that things have improved since then.

SM: No, I definitely agree. And that's something that, you know, living here and then doing these interviews, I've realized that not a lot of people have realized how much — because people haven't been back — how much change and improvement has really gone on since the period that they left.

MS: They paint an image in the media. And now I think it's better.

SM: Yeah, I agree. And well, I had to ask you, I forgot earlier when you're talking about baseball, were you a Yankee fan growing up? Still a Yankees fan?

MS: Oh yeah. I'm one of those weird people that likes the Mets also, but not as much. I grew up in the Bronx. I mean, where we lived on Jerome Avenue, it was only a couple of blocks from Yankee Stadium. Ironically, I didn't really go to that many games, my grandfather took me a couple of times. But I became a bigger fan around the early 80s and went to a lot of games. Now you don't go to quite as many. And also I miss the old stadium. It was better. I don't know if you ever went there.

SM: I did when I was younger. I've been to quite a few. But I remember going to the old stadium before the new one.

MS: I kind of thought that — because they did it once in the 70s where they renovated it — I kind of thought they could have done that again, but apparently it would have been more expensive.

SM: And so you know, when you think back on your time in the Bronx, what kind of emotions and memories do you associate with it?

MS: I guess it's a mixture. Because, you know, some of the things were very positive. Like my experience in Van Cortlandt Park, doing hiking there. You don't know that you're in the Bronx, it's like you're in the woods. And I guess I did later also have some negative feelings. It's like, I didn't really feel — I don't like to think of myself as racist, but I felt like I was becoming a minority. So that was kind of a weird feeling. Because even though I might not have negative opinions about the other groups, they might have those opinions about me. So I don't know if that was the only reason for leaving. I think it was really more for more space. I did talk a lot with my wife about possibly buying a house in the Bronx. But ultimately, we decided to go to Westchester. And you know, I do kind of regret it in some ways. And I guess the way I make up for it is by coming back here to visit.



SM: Yeah. And certainly being able to talk about your experiences and share them with us is great. Well, Do you have anything else you'd like to add? That's the end of my questions.

MS: No, but things always come to me later, after the fact. So I'll —

SM: Send them to me, I'm more than happy to take a look at them.

MS: And if you think of a whole other topic you'd like to ask me about, I could come back again.

SM: Yeah. Oh, absolutely. Thank you.