



10-25-2004

## **Bergland, Beatrice and Bergland, Harriet**

Bronx African American History Project  
*Fordham University*

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### **Recommended Citation**

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Interviewees: Beatrice Berglaine & Harriet Waites  
Interviewer: Dr. Mark Naison; Bronx, NY  
Oct 25, 2004

Transcriber: Colleen McCafferty

Dr. Mark Naison (MN): - - interview of the Bronx African American History Project.

This is October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2004 at Fordham University and we're here with Beatrice Berglaine and Harriet Waites of the Community Church of Morrisania. Now I'd like to start out talking a little bit about the history of your church, and then how you came to do this - - your own black history museum. First how did the church get started and when did it get started?

Harriet Waites (HW): Ok, the pastor emeritus now, William E. Thompson, was the founder.

Beatrice Berglaine (BB): He and I and other people thought that there was a need for a church in the area; it was east of the Concourse. [cough] Excuse me, so they got together and they first met in a Y, YMCA, and they took up a collection, they raised \$84 dollars and one cents that day and from that point Reverend Thompson decided to borrow money from his parents for a house that he saw in Teller Avenue that he could use for the church. So he bought it, the house, for \$10,000, and turned it into a church, and the rest was - -

MN: - - was history. Now this was 1956?

BB: Yes.

MN: Now, is one of the - - when your saying there was a need for a church east of the Concourse is that because there was an African American community that was developing in that neighborhood at that time?

BB: Yes.

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MN: Because, from my own research most of the African American community in the Thirties and Forties was east of Webster Avenue, and basically, Teller Avenue is up the hill west of there.

BB: Right, this is between the Concourse and from Mount Eden, I'm not sure how far down it went but up to Mount Eden and east of the Concourse. But there were no - - and it's a non-denominational church.

MN: Right, and how did people find out about this church and become associated with it? Perhaps each of you could tell us, for, you first, Harriet, how did you find out about the church and become associated with it?

HW: Actually I had a very good friend who lived in Brooklyn on Park Place, in Park Slope, and she used to come to church up in the Bronx. So one Sunday she asked me to come to church with her, so I came to church with her, and I've been there ever since.

MN: Now what did you find there that was lacking in other churches that you had been part of?

HW: I found the sincerity of the pastor, the warmth of the, of the congregation, the sincerity of everybody that I came in contact with. It was just different. And it was real, it was real; you could feel the spirit. At other churches you go and you're reading from the Bible or people are quoting things from the Bible, but anybody can quote from the Bible, but to see people living this way is what made me feel the way I did.

MN: Now, obviously a church that creates their own Black History museum and has adopted an orphanage in Africa has some kind of social consciousness, was that also something that in the church that impressed you? Were people politically active or socially conscious in a way that wasn't always true?

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HW: I think our pastor was socially conscious - -

BB: He teaches us that we should give back, yes. Not just take, take, take, but always give back.

HW: He's a very giving pastor.

BB: Yes, yes, that's the example that he teaches, yes.

MN: Now Beatrice, when did you become involved with the community?

BB: Approximately, between 1979 and 1980, when I retired from the prison system - -

MN: Had you been a corrections officer, or in a different capacity?

BB: I was a correction officer and lieutenant for thirty years. I retired from the system, correction officer, for the first five to eight years I worked at Sing-Sing, Great Meadow, name of the prisons. And I came to the city for a year; I toured the prison academy, the upstate academy, and I was in the city, I returned to the city around 1979 and retired from Parkside, which was approximately thirty years in the prison system. I had just retired when I decided that I should jump into church with all fours. I knew about Reverend Thompson, and I have a great respect for this man, he's not only smart, brilliant I thought, but he sets a great example, he sets a great example for people. And that's the church I wanted to be in; the church that taught. That the young should give back and bond and reverse. People should be giving and not just want to take and that what you should do in life is work towards having God say, "well done my good and faithful servant" in the end. Not just work for rewards and see what you can get out of life. Yes so I went there about 1979 to '80. I had a good friend, we were - - in my younger years I was acting I didn't get anywhere with it, but I met a friend who lived on the same street, on Teller Avenue, and I joined that church through her, she would come to me and ask

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me - - we would collect pennies to take the kids on trips, jars of pennies and so she would she was getting pennies from her friends and I would give her pennies in jars to collect so the kids could go on trips, and that's how I got involved with the church. I knew other people who were there and I heard so many great things about Reverend Thompson. So I went and I became a part of that, the congregation.

MN: Now Harriet what kind of work did you do? When you were - -

HW: I worked for the Postal Service, fact I worked here in the Bronx.

HW: Right; now were many people in the church civil servants? Was that something that a lot of - - because both of you worked for the government. Reverend Thompson you told me was a teacher and worked for social services.

BB: I would say most of the people were teachers and come from the educational system, wouldn't you?

HW: A lot of teachers, yes.

BB: A lot of teachers, yes.

HW: But then we also had a lot of people that - - domestic workers, like nannies and stuff worked in the church.

MN: So it wasn't all college educated people?

BB: No.

HW: No, no.

MN: Now, was an emphasis on African American history always part of this church's like identity? Is that something that - - or is it something that has developed over time?

BB: Let me, I'm sorry the African American part of it is related to our mission's ministry. And the mission's ministry, I'm the chairperson of the mission's ministry, but

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that's just one of twenty-three ministries that the church has. Yes, so that's just the small part of what we do.

HW: And we, before we got into the mission, the African part, pastor always told us that our roots - - a church without roots was dead. So we always were made aware of our roots. Only not - - you know in society in church, and so forth.

MN: Now when you're talking about mission's ministries you're talking about - -

BB: Here and abroad. We take care of people here: our congregation really first; people in the community - - We give our clothing, food; take care of needs you know, people come and people - - especially now, you'd be surprised at the things that people need.

And they're ashamed to say so, and so it's made known to us, and once it's made known to us, we belong to an agency that gives free clothes, I mean new clothing, new clothing.

HW: We also have an agency for seniors, it's called Human Concerns, where the social worker there, she makes arrangements for people that are home that are bed ridden, so that someone comes to take care of them, that they get - - that they're funded so that they can have food and their rent is paid, if they have to go to the hospital she makes arrangements for someone to take them to the hospital. I mean she really goes out for the seniors.

MN: So in other words, this is an institution that's constantly involved in helping people in need.

BB: Exactly.

MN: In the community and - -

BB: - - and other wise, yes.

MN: - - and other wise. And was that something that was there from the beginning?

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BB: No, no we've grown to that. We've grown, always, not always here and abroad, but we've always been doing it small-scale, what do they say, "Acorns grow into big oaks"?

HW: Actually the pastor was doing it on his own in the beginning. And then he thought that he was growing old, he wanted to retire, but he wanted everything that he was doing to be carried on. So what he decided to do was to develop these different - -

BB: Ministries.

HW: - - ministries so that there would be someone in charge of seeing that it's carried out. And he would teach the person the way he wanted it to go, then that's the way it has been.

BB: Exactly.

MN: Now Harriet, when you joined the church how many members did it have?

HW: Close to two hundred I'm sure.

MN: So it's about the same size.

BB: We have about three hundred now.

MN: Oh you have about three hundred? And is there a younger generation of people who are entering the church or is it predominantly people of our generation?

HW: Right now I would say its younger people because of the pastor.

MN: So you've reached out and renewed the congregation with younger people?

BB: He does a street reach.

MN: Oh really?

BB: Yes, yes, he does a street reach. And so this brings in people from the community.

MN: Now what, describe to us what a street reach involves.

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BB: He goes out, he gives out pamphlets, he's talked to people and tell them, tried to educate them about coming to church, and asked them to come. They come, a lot of them stay, and some of them don't.

HW: He and a group, he goes with a group of people, yes.

MN: Now in terms - - when did you start collecting the material on African American history and putting it in the church as an educational endeavor, not just for the congregation but the community; how did this start?

BB: This started in what year? The year that I was ordained as a deacon. And I was told to go out into the world and - -

HW: About 1990.

BB: '90 about '90 yes, it was about 1990, yes.

MN: Now had you done this kind of work before in your job or in, in - -

BB: No.

MN: So you had never been a collector of African, African Americana?

BB: No, no; but after collecting information for ten years and sending donations to the people, the the SOS orphanage in Africa, the school for the blind, the churches, I decided that we should go on a pilgrimage and that we should see these people face to face, see where our money is going, see where the clothing is going, see what they're doing with whatever, so we decided to go on our pilgrimage, and go to Africa and meet the people face to face and now we have a hands on relationship with them.

MN: Right, and what year was that trip, that first trip?

BB: The first trip was 2003.

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MN: So you've been doing this for ten years before you actually you know took the trip back?

BB: Exactly, yes.

MN: And what was that experience like? Being in Africa for the first time especially - -

BB: It was magnificent! It was something like I had never experienced and I will probably never experience in my lifetime. Just arriving there on African soil and people greeting us they were so warm and they make you feel joyful and wonderful. Seeing the poverty is something that you don't feel sorry for because of the attitudes of the people; they love God, they love God, so and they're faith in God is so strong. And they make you feel loved and warm and just a joy that they make you feel is something that you can't really explain, you can't. The little child in the orphanage that held my hand and didn't want to let go, you know I'll never forget that feeling, yes. It was wonderful, wonderful - - Hearing the African drums for the first time, and I was at a meeting, they have lots of meetings, right and they want you to sit down and listen while they're having these meetings and you hear the drums and I couldn't keep still and I had to get up and go - - [laughs] my African roots will make me go with the rhythm of the drums and the other people follow me - - eight people went with me on this pilgrimage, and we began to dance along with this drum beat and the others joined us and we formed a conga line and it was just magnificent, yes.

MN: Harriet were you on this pilgrimage?

HW: No, trust me I didn't go on the trip. But I do would say that the trip came about because we went on our church conference, we have a church conference every year and

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it's held in different states, and I think the year that we met the people from Africa that made us go make the church make the visit I think - -

BB: - - The International Council of Community Churches.

HW: - - of Community Churches. And I think we met the Reverend Assari and another pastor - -

BB: Iyami.

HW: Iyami, but Assari was from Ghana. And that's what made us interested in wanting to go. But unfortunately my health doesn't allow me to travel to places like that, for that I would've been - -

BB: For they are also members of the International Council - -

MN: Now how many churches are in this International Council?

BB: Oh heavens!

MN: Like thousands?

BB: Yes, yes, hundreds.

HW: Hundreds, I would say, yes.

BB: I would say hundreds, I would say hundreds, and they are members, those in Africa are members of what they call I triple C (ICCC).

MN: Now are there other community churches in the Bronx?

HW: There are other community churches in the Bronx but they don't belong to International Council of Community Churches.

MN: So you're the only Bronx congregation that belongs to the International Council - -

BB: I believe so, I believe so, and we've been members since 1947 is it? Nineteen forty-something - -

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MN: Now were there others in any others in other boroughs?

BB: Oh yes, Manhattan - -

HW: In Manhattan, the church of St. Paul's on 145<sup>th</sup> Street is a member.

MN: Now theologically this is a non-denominational church, how is ritual and liturgy and other things shaped? I mean what how do you I mean in the real, in the daily life of the church how do you draw upon different traditions? And how is that done? Is that mostly from the minister or all of you study together and figure this out?

HW: With the pastor emeritus it was more a non-denominational ritual.

BB: More high liturgical.

HW: Yes, but now with the pastor that we have now he's from a Baptist background and consequently the church is worshiping more in a Baptist way.

BB: - - style, that style.

HW: But we do have things like candles on the alter which the Baptist church does not have, we also pass the collection plates which Baptist churches don't, you walk up and bring your money in a Baptist church. Communion, I think communion is a little different also, we use wafers and juice, and I don't think they do that in a Baptist church. So there are still a few things.

MN: Is there much opportunity for members of the congregation to speak to the rest of the congregation? Or is it more the ministers?

BB: During the service?

MN: During the service. Do people get up and speak you know - -

BB: To give testimonies, yes.

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HW: Like last - - yesterday, yesterday morning at the early morning service they gave testimonies, they didn't do it at the midday service, so there are times that you can do it.

Ok they also there's bible study during the week where you can talk and fellowship.

Friday night there's a prayer service where you can talk and fellowship. Saturday morning the same thing, there's prayer meetings where you can talk and fellowship.

BB: Thursday morning.

HW: Thursday morning when the seniors meet and they eat and - -

MN: Because it seems like you have this tremendous tradition of activism and involvement and so is that something that comes from the pastor down or is it that all as a member you are expected to be active?

BB: I don't know, I think each one of us brings our love with us, I think, to make a nice blend.

MN: Now I want to sort of trace back to each of your experiences in the Bronx, now Beatrice your family moved here in 19 - -

BB: Approximately '40, approximately 1940. I came I was just about four years old and we moved from Brathurst Avenue to Grant Avenue, 1324 Grant Avenue. Just a little girl I went to school around the corner, PS 88.

MN: Right, now that was a predominantly Jewish neighborhood at the time?

BB: It was all Jewish! I never saw another black kid around there. We were the only two black children, they used to chase us home everyday. My brother, myself, which was around the corner, Grant Avenue, and was just around the corner from, and still is, around the corner from Sheridan, the school was on Sheridan, ok up the block and around the corner, and we used to get chased home every morning until one day I said to my

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brother, “you know why are you running that boy came to school in a stroller.” I

remember him, the mothers the Jewish mothers used to bring the kids to school in the big straw strollers, [MN Laughs] yes they did, yes. So the kid would come out of school with us and the kid would be waiting for his mother to arrive with the stroller to take him back home. So one day we just stopped running, we just stood still and stopped running and I said, “Chase him,” you know and I think they stopped then bothering us. But that was the school where they wouldn’t even hold our hands playing ring-around-the-rosie and maypole, you remember the maypole?

MN: Wow, so it was a very hostile environment at first.

BB: With children, I only felt it with the children, but the teachers wouldn’t make the kids hold our hands either, they didn’t insist that they do it.

MN: So the teachers gave in to the prejudice?

BB: Yes. I used to beg my mother to move, beg my mother to move. But she had moved, my grandfather was a super in the building on Grant Avenue, and she moved, she and my father moved to with my grandfather so they could find an apartment, so they could look and find a place to live.

MN: Did it ever start getting less hostile?

BB: No, no.

MN: It was a hostile environment - -

BB: When we moved from there it was hostile, we moved to Tinton Avenue and 163<sup>rd</sup> Street, 970 Tinton Ave.

MN: In what year?

BB: Oh, about four years, we stayed in that house about three or four years.

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MN: So in the four years. Now you had mentioned something that your grandfather had been killed - -

BB: He was killed, his naked body was left, burned body on a radiator, naked body on a radiator. He had this interracial relationship with a Miss Bobby, a white lady there and my mother had moved already to Tinton Ave and she went back to visit and found his naked body on a radiator. Right, she denounced God right then and there.

MN: So he was killed because of that relationship?

BB: Yes, yes.

MN: Was this ever in the papers, was this -

BB: I don't know, I really don't know, I don't know that part of it, I just remember I was a little girl then.

MN: Wow, so this is between 1940 and '44, you're experience of this predominantly Jewish neighborhood in the Bronx was as an incredibly hostile place - -

BB: Exactly.

MN: - - for a young African American.

BB: Yes, where they wouldn't hold my hands, where they chased me, they chased my brother, where we were the only blacks as far as I know at PS 88. Now PS 88 had its attributes, they were the only school with the luncheon menu. I didn't know of another school that did that, sent the menu home so your parents could say what they wanted you to eat. But they killed my grandfather there, his name was Eddie Jones, Eddie Edward Jones, right.

MN: And let's get the building - -

BB: 1324 Grant Avenue.

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MN: - - Avenue and he was killed in that building?

BB: Yes, and his naked body was left on a hot radiator, laying across a hot radiator, yes.

MN: Now Miss Bobby, this woman, was she from the same building or?

BB: I believe she lived in the building or very close by, she was always there, right.

MN: Now when you moved to Tinton Avenue what elementary school did you go to?

BB: PS 23.

MN: So you went to PS 23?

BB: PS 23, yes.

MN: And this was - -

BB: Loved it.

MN: And was this a predominantly African American school or almost all African American?

BB: It wasn't African American at all; it was very, it was very integrated.

MN: So it was an integrated school that worked?

BB: Exactly, it worked. We for, for - - I was so happy because we had all kinds of friends. We had Irish, Italian, you know it was a [indistinguishable] where all kinds of people. We didn't think about race there.

MN: And this was Tinton between where and where?

BB: It was right off a hundred - - 970 Tinton Avenue, right off 163<sup>rd</sup> Street, right the projects were not there yet.

MN: Ok, right this is right near where Johnson's Barbeque is.

BB: Exactly, around the corner from Johnson's Barbeque.

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MN: Johnson's Barbeque, ok. Are the houses still there or they were on the side where the projects were built?

BB: No across from the projects.

MN: Ok so they might still be there?

BB: 960, 970, and 967, 976.

MN: It was nine twenty- -

BB: Right they were, you had the courtyards, they were courtyard buildings.

MN: Right, now is your building still there?

BB: I'm not sure, I haven't gone back there.

MN: Well I'm going to drive by, what's the number?

BB: Oh great! 970, nine seven oh.

MN: Ok, so it was a multiracial neighborhood and - -

BB: Multiracial.

MN: And what was it like - - so your block was a great place to grow up?

BB: Oh yes, yes, although my mother didn't let me go out to play too much. I couldn't go out. What we did was, and at my grandfather's house too at 970, we played a lot in the backyard, we played a lot in the backyard. If you wanted to go to Union Avenue you wouldn't walk on flat ground. The kids would play in the backyard and there was what we called a cliff, because in the back of the house it was a high elevation, so Union Avenue, which was behind Tinton Avenue you know you'd get there by climbing these high cliffs. So the kids that was our activity we loved to climb the cliffs and go back, you know you couldn't go too far as a kid without your parents but you could play in the backyard.

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MN: So what kind of games did you play as a kid?

BB: Oh gee, ring-a-levio, potsy, what else? What kind of ball was that? Slug-o, slug-o - -  
What else, with the bottle caps in the street, what do you call that?

HW: Skully.

BB: Skully, yes, yes, that was a good game. Yes, we'd play games like that. Or we  
would go up on Saturday morning and fish in the Crotona Park Lake.

MN: You would fish in the Crotona Park Lake?

BB: Oh yes, you would take a string and a safety pin, and you could fish in the lake. And  
they would have the fish in there to go fish for us to catch. You'd come home with your  
treasure: goldfish, right. That was big fun.

MN: Now Harriet, where did you grow up?

HW: Well between Manhattan and South Jersey.

MN: Ok, so it was very different. The South Jersey was more rural?

HW: Oh yes, definitely

MN: Now what junior high school did you go to?

BB: PS 10, which was an all-girls school on Eagle Avenue and 163<sup>rd</sup> Street, walking  
distance.

MN: Now when you were going to school, what was the music that was popular when  
you were in junior high school?

BB: Doo wop. Doo wop oh yes yes, those were great days.

MN: Now did you sing?

BB: I did. I sang and we had a group of us. My boyfriend was Gene Red.

MN: Oh Gene Red! Oh boy!

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BB: Gene Red, yes, he was very - - especially popular because his father played for what's his name, oh gosh I'm drawing a blank here, it'll come to me. But there was Gene Red, Jean Martin, Arthur Crier.

MN: So you knew Arthur when you were growing up?

BB: Oh yes, oh yes. We would spend lots of time in Gene's house; Gene lived in the basement part of 584 East 164<sup>th</sup> Street. And we'd just stay at the piano and invent songs and write songs. Arthur would do most of the writing, Gene would sing; all of us, for hours and hours.

MN: Now did your junior high have a music program?

BB: No the high school did. So that was the end of my junior high school year, going into high school and my first year of high school, actually all of us were in the band or orchestra, or had some other part - -

MN: Now what high school was this?

BB: Morris high.

MN: So you went to Morris High School. And you were in the band?

BB: The orchestra.

MN: And what was your instrument?

BB: My instrument was the cello.

MN: Uh huh, now where did you get a cello?

BB: The school.

MN: And you took it - -

BB: The school would let you take the instruments home!

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MN: You had a cello which you were allowed to take home? And you could take a cello home and nobody would bother you?

BB: Oh yes, yes, exactly.

MN: It was the kind of thing where you wouldn't have any problem in that?

BB: No problem, take it home and practice.

MN: Wow, so you were in the school orchestra.

BB: I was in the school orchestra, yes. Gene played the flute, I played the cello, Gary, who was a friend of Arthur Crier's also, he played the bass. Who else do I remember?

HW: John Johnson.

BB: Johnnie Johnson! It's a strange thing because I just we went to our church the other day, last weekend, and of all the times I met Johnnie Johnson who was in the same school as us and he plays drums and he yes, and he's now - -

HW: And guitar.

BB: And guitar, yes, he was a part of that group also, Johnnie Johnson, yes.

MN: Is he a professional musician now?

BB: He sings, he sings, he sang then. As a matter of fact he went for - - all of us went for class something, right. Arthur Crier dropped out he wasn't with us in the last year.

MN: Well he went to school, he went to a school in Manhattan.

BB: Yes, because he left, he left us.

MN: He didn't want to go, he went to some school that he was very unhappy at in Manhattan and then he joined the Marines. So did you, were there talent shows at Morris?

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BB: All the time, all the time. Gene was class singer, Johnnie was class singer, I was class actress; music was important to us!

MN: Was there theatre at Morris?

BB: Yes, I went for class actress, I was the best theatre - - oh Morris High School yes!

MN: Now what sort of - - what what did you do any theatre before you got to Morris?

BB: No.

MN: So there weren't community theatres or church related theatres?

BB: There may have been but I wasn't in - -

MN: So it was at Morris where you began acting?

BB: Exactly. It was at Morris where I began everything. I was really a problem child. I didn't know my own identity, I would cry if you looked at me, I would - - I became a person, I became alive at Morris High School.

MN: Now now do you think that some of the issues that you had related to that very hostile and traumatic experience in Grant Avenue? Do you think that had anything to do with it?

BB: It could have I have not thought of that until you asking me now, but people were so nice and kind and wonderful and all races, that Morris and 23, once we moved from there, we just didn't have race issues. Now I'm not saying that there were not race issues because I remember not being able to go to White Castle, and I remember not being able to eat at Howard Johnson's, and that was right here in the Bronx.

MN: Now the White Castle, this was the one on Fordham Road?

BB: Bruckner Boulevard.

MN: There was a Bruckner - - there was a White Castle on - -

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BB: There was a Bruckner Boulevard White Castle, yes.

MN: And if you were black they wouldn't serve you?

BB: No you had to go to the counter, you could take out - -

MN: But you couldn't sit in the restaurant?

BB: No, no.

MN: Now this was - -

BB: In the Bronx.

MN: And this was at Bruckner Boulevard and where?

BB: Yes. They had the girls on skates; where was that on Bruckner Boulevard?

HW: I remember that.

MN: And this was in the fifties or the forties?

BB: Oh sure sure.

HW: Late forties.

BB: Late forties.

MN: Late forties, ok. Now where was the Howard Johnson's located?

BB: Howard Johnson's was Bruckner Boulevard also, further over.

MN: Was this like up towards the Whitestone Bridge area?

BB: Exactly, exactly.

MN: Ok, so those, the White Castle and the Howard Johnson's wouldn't serve African Americans from tables.

BB: Not from the tables, you couldn't eat inside, you could take out.

MN: When did that change finally? In the fifties?

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BB: I think in the fifties because we went in the fifties, right. But you see we were so used to going, you could go in the car, and they would skate out to the car and serve you, so you weren't used to going inside anyway, at the drive-ins.

MN: So the White Castle, they would serve you on skates?

BB: I think it was White Castle they would skate over, right?

HW: Yes, yes.

BB: You weren't used to going inside anyway.

HW: They'd put something on your car window.

BB: On the car, right.

MN: Damn.

BB: [laughs] Sure.

MN: Now were there particular teachers who had an influence on you at Morris?

BB: Mr. Miller, Mr. Miller was the orchestra teacher. And when I first went into high school I played hooky and a lot, a lot. We were having big fun, we'd have hooky clubs and we'd play hooky.

MN: You had hooky clubs?

BB: Yes, they had such great teachers that got you in line; I'll never forget there was a woman, my memory's bad so I brought her name with me, just in case I forgot, Miss Walker, I think it is. She had me working in the office, she took an interest in me. And she, it was because of her that I became interested in my classes and doing well and - -

MN: So you hadn't done that well in junior high?

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BB: Well you know your parents keep, have more control of you in junior high. They were younger, yes, I was doing ok, but you had more freedom in high school; changing classes, running, playing in the halls - -

MN: So tell me about these hooky clubs.

BB: Oh yes.

MN: What were, what was a hooky club?

BB: My parents, my mother didn't work, my father was a chef.

MN: Where was your father a chef at?

BB: The Dixie Kitchen, 1 East 48<sup>th</sup> Street that was the most, I think it was the first soul food place downtown in the metropolitan area.

MN: The Dixie Kitchen?

BB: The Dixie Kitchen, 1 East 48<sup>th</sup> Street. My mother didn't work, you know women didn't work before the war, that just didn't - -

MN: And how many children in the house?

BB: I have three brothers.

MN: Ok, and are they older or younger or it varies?

BB: I have one older brother Lavin, and Rex and Randy are younger.

MN: Ok.

BB: So my mother was home all day, so we couldn't play hooky and stay home, ok so we had a couple of students whose mother had to go to work, and we would play hooky and go to either one of those houses. Ok now, when we played hooky we would just be singing and making up songs, you know we would do things like that. So teachers in

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school - - and the cards would come home from school and I'd get a knife and go in the mailbox and pull the card out, sign the card, that happened for a good while.

MN: So you weren't doing really wild things?

BB: Not in the first year, this was the first year of high school.

MN: Ok, because I know some of the things that were going on in hooky clubs when my daughter was in junior high and it was a lot shadier than that.

BB: Yes, we would get on the bus and take the train all the way down and you had the el, and we'd take the el all the way down to Brooklyn High to see the boys and you know come back pass the Rupert's Record Room with what do you call it the bid companies or something.

HW: Rupert's yes.

BB: So things like that so a lot of the kids who were with me began to drop out, began to fail, get left back.

MN: Now where - - these were all people you knew from the neighborhood who were in the hooky club or there were some of them - -

BB: Not really they most of the kids we met in high school. Most of that group, most of that group we met in high school and they were all people who were interested in music I would say.

MN: Yes, now and a number of them didn't stay in school?

BB: Exactly. So now I began to fail, so Lillian Walker, is her name, who worked in the office at Morris High School, said to me one day, "You know, you're not doing right, something's wrong here. You can't get a good job with this kind of record, I was looking at your record, she said you know what I'm going to do," I hate to say this on tape, she

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said, "I'm going to take away all of this bad stuff, I want you to start from fresh." That's what she told me. She said - - she taught me the switchboard she let me come after school and run the switchboard, she taught me office skills, she let me work right there, and what I brought with me is [laughs] a couple of the certificates thanking me for running the office there, and it kind of changed my life in school, it changed my life.

MN: Wow, so this is not a teacher, this is somebody that's like a secretary?

BB: She wasn't a teacher, yes, she was an office worker at Morris High School.

MN: Wow, look at this, and what is that letter for? Is that a boyfriend?

BB: An office worker. You would earn this, the "M" that you wore on - - you were very proud of you earned, "major M" they called it. The hat, you would proudly wear the hat. This is - - I have letters from her, and a picture of her. But thanking me, my yearbook from Morris High School.

MN: With all those signatures. And this is a 1954 yearbook?

BB: 1954 yearbook, that's right.

MN: Wow. Now that, look at that, such a - -

BB: Yes, Beatrice Johnson.

[Interruption]

MN: Wow.

BB: So this woman, Lillian Walker, who had taken an interest in me, not only taught me the office skills, taught me the switchboard, what to do, how to run an office. But she was responsible; she and Hattie Jackman. My friend in high school, my best friend Jean Martin, took me home one day to meet her aunt, and her Aunt Hattie Jackman, I was able to go to her and talk to her. And she worked at the Trinity Bar, Trinity Bar and Grill,

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which was on the corner of Peasdale Place, where Boston Road begins. And I go and I sit in a bar and I talk to Hattie.

MN: Now what kind of place was that the Trinity Bar & Grill?

BB: A bar and grill, where everybody sat drinking, and I wasn't drinking but I was able to just sit and talk, she became my mentor.

MN: Wow, now was this a like a neighborhood place?

BB: Exactly, a neighborhood bar and grill.

MN: And it wasn't a dangerous - -

BB: No! You knew everyone. Yes, you knew everyone and everyone knew you. And so I imagine my mother at that time didn't know I was sitting at a bar, you know, but Hattie is still my best friend today. That same woman, ok. So I don't know what I would've done without her, I don't know what I would've done without Lillian Walker.

MN: And what about this teacher that you mentioned, Mr. Miller?

BB: Mr. Miller, oh Mr. Miller because Mr. Miller I'm sorry Lillian Walker talked to him and he allowed me if I wanted to cut a class I could go to the office and just sit and rehearse, just sit and rehearse, just sit and practice, practice, practice. Yes, which was wonderful back then. so that's what I did, there was a class I was disturbed about or something I was disturbed about in school I could go and just practice, yes.

MN: Now where - - do you recall Tinton Avenue as being a good place to grow up?

BB: My mother didn't let me go out to play much, so I couldn't play with the kids much. I could practice, I could go in the backyard where she could see us because the apartment was in the back. She said that anybody from Kelly Street, she should know Colin Powell

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now right, I wish she had lived to see this, she said anybody from Kelly Street on that

side of Prospect Avenue, they were going to jail. [Laughter]

MN: So that was considered a tough area?

BB: Exactly.

MN: That Colin Powell and Gene Norman's block were considered - - ok.

BB: Exactly, exactly.

MN: Now were there gangs in those days?

BB: Sure, you had the Slicksters, you had the Copians, yes.

MN: Now did any of the guys you know in high school were any of them in gangs?

BB: Not in my high school.

MN: Or it wasn't a big thing in Morris?

BB: No, no, no - - My brother, one of my oldest brothers, was a member of the Copians, his nickname was Jack. And my mother never ever knew it. She didn't know. That was her angel as far as she was concerned. But he was in the Copians. But the people that I hung out with, they were - - nobody was - - no the gangs they wouldn't - - didn't bother us either, they didn't - - I don't know if it was because my brother was a member of the gang [Interruption] or if it was because between Tinton Avenue and 164<sup>th</sup> Street I would walk from one to the other because that's where my friends were - - so I'm skipping a little time now - -

MN: Did you ever feel unsafe walking through - -

BB: Never, never, never. Maybe it was stupidity, I'm not sure whether it was that safe or whether kids just aren't aware of danger, but no I never felt - - you know there was no snatching of bags or bothering people, no.

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MN: Now Harriet, when did you move to the Bronx?

HW: 1963.

MN: And where to - - to what street did you move when you moved?

HW: Laconia Avenue and 219<sup>th</sup> Street.

MN: Oh, so you moved up to the north Bronx. And did you buy a house there at that time?

HW: Rented.

MN: You rented. And was that neighborhood racially mixed at the time?

HW: Yes, it was.

MN: Were there a lot of Italian people still living up there?

HW: For a short while, yes.

MN: And how long did you live in that particular area?

HW: '63, seventy - - about twelve years.

MN: Right and this is - - you were married at the time?

HW: No I was - - I mean, I wasn't I was divorced from my husband at the time, that's when I moved from Manhattan to the Bronx.

MN: Now did you have children with you?

HW: I had two daughters.

MN: You had two daughters and you moved to that area. And what was it like living up there? Was that a good environment to bring up children?

HW: Yes, my children didn't want to leave the neighborhood they had been living in in the Bronx because they were - -

MN: You mean Manhattan?

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HW: Yes, I'm sorry in Manhattan. But once they got there, got my son-in-law. My daughter met him, was one of the first people she met when she moved to the Bronx. So they've been going out since they were thirteen and fourteen years old; and now they've been married twenty-five years, so.

MN: Wow. Now did your children go to public junior high?

HW: Yes, 135. And then they went to Evander Childs.

MN: Oh they went to Evander, ok. And was that a good school at that time?

HW: I think so. In fact my youngest daughter finished school six months early, yes.

MN: And what - - did they end up going to college?

HW: My youngest daughter went to Howard, I'm sorry not to Howard to down 68<sup>th</sup> street - -

MN: Hunter, right.

HW: Hunter, she did two & half years, she never finished, she got married. And my other daughter she went to - -

BB: Lehman.

HW: Excuse me?

BB: Lehman?

HW: No. She went - - it's SUNY, I think its SUNY.

MN: SUNY, yes.

BB: Yes, New Rochelle.

MN: Right; is it Purchase?

HW: No - -

BB: Maybe it was Purchase.

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HW: The College of New Rochelle - -

MN: Oh, College of New Rochelle.

HW: - - and she, she graduated with her - - in Psychology.

MN: Right now what church, were you a member of a church when you were living in Laconia Avenue?

HW: Same church.

MN: This Community Church?

HW: Yes. Well actually no, I'm sorry I wasn't.

MN: You were in a different church? And what denomination was that church?

HW: Episcopal.

MN: So what year was it you found out about the Community Church and began attending there?

HW: 1975 or '76, I'm not sure.

MN: So you'd been living there for like twelve years. And when you moved from Laconia Avenue where was your next stop?

HW: It was also in the Bronx but it was Bronx Boulevard, yes, 229<sup>th</sup> Street and Bronx Boulevard.

MN: Now you said your mother gave up on God after her father was killed - -

BB: Exactly.

MN: So did you grow - - did your - - you and your siblings not go to church when you were growing up?

BB: My father said to us, "you got to get out of here." He had a Baptist background, my mother used to belong to - - what's the church, Adam Clayton Powell's church - -

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MN: Abyssinian.

BB: Abyssinian Baptist Church, and he had a Baptist background, so my father says, “you got to get out of here and scout, find a church, your comfort zone.” So every Sunday we would go to different churches.

MN: Right, and what were some of the churches in Morrisania that you went to?

BB: 165<sup>th</sup> Street - - We went to first St. Anthony’s on 166<sup>th</sup>.

MN: Right, the Catholic Church.

BB: Catholic Church, and I wanted to join a Catholic Church, I knocked on the door and the Catholic priest came to the door with a mug of beer in his hand, so I didn’t want any more parts of that. [MN Laughs] I went to 165<sup>th</sup> - -

MN: St. Augustine’s.

BB: St. Augustine’s on 165<sup>th</sup> Street and Prospect Avenue, right. I didn’t stay there long. We went to different churches, we went to a lot - -

MN: Did you ever go to Thessalonia on 163<sup>rd</sup> and - -

BB: You know, I believe that’s where I heard Martin Luther King, that’s - - it wasn’t Polite Boulevard then, but that’s where - -

MN: It was Stebbins.

BB: Yes, Stebbins Ave, and that’s where I heard Martin Luther King speak for the first time.

MN: Really, so he spoke there?

BB: He spoke there, yes. Patty took me there to hear him speak.

MN: And this was in the ‘60s or the ‘50s?

BB: I think it was in the fifties, it had to be in the fifties.

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MN: Just after the Montgomery Bus Boycott drafts?

BB: Yes, yes, he came to speak, and that's where I heard him speak for the first time, right, right there, yes.

MN: Now both of you have been living in the Bronx since the - - your case since the forties and your case since the sixties, when did you start to notice that really bad things were happening in some parts of the Bronx?

BB: The changes began happening very slowly. At first there was an influx of West Indian people, and black people were kind of scared because they were different. They were different and they spoke differently - -

MN: Now your family was from the South originally?

BB: My mother's a native New Yorker, and my father's family is from Florida, yes. And so first, and then Hispanic people began to come in. And the whites started moving.

MN: And was there a point at which you began to feel like neighborhoods were getting unsafe?

BB: Well I think - - I'll tell you as a girl I walked the Concourse, I remember when the Jewish women would look out the window and say, "Girlie, girlie you looking for a day's work?" which was always very annoying. But the black people were on the Concourse cleaning, and the Jewish people, I think when Co-Op City opened - -

MN: Right.

BB: - - began to move from the Concourse to Co-Op City and a big change took place then.

MN: Right so you had the experience, like let's say in the 1950s, if you were walking along the Concourse they would - - people would shout out "girlie, girlie"?

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BB: Yes, yes, yes. You were just walking under their window and they would ask you if you were looking for a day's work. Don't forget those were the times when you had the rag-man and the line-man, the man would come along selling his clothing lines and - -

MN: Right, right. So Co-Op City brought a certain depopulation of those neighborhoods?

BB: Sure, yes.

MN: When did you start noticing drugs becoming an issue?

BB: Not until I got married.

MN: Which was what year?

BB: 1955.

MN: So as early as that you started to notice that there was a drug problem?

BB: Yes, yes.

MN: Heroin mainly?

BB: Heroin, heroin.

MN: And how did you experience that? Did you see it like people nodding out or you knew people or - -

BB: I married a heroin addict.

MN: Oh, wow.

BB: And I was warned, I was forewarned. My best friend Hattie told me, Joe Berslaid was using heroin, I said, "oh no, no he's not he can't possibly be using heroin."

MN: Now how old were you when the two of you - -

BB: Twenty, twenty.

MN: Ok, and what were you doing at the time when you met him?

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BB: Well the same building where we had been hanging out and *<where all my friends lived on 164<sup>th</sup> street, he lived in that building. So I ended up as a married person, the same building where my friends were.>*

[END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

*<MN: - - marry somebody that was nine years older. What sort of work was he doing when you met him?*

*BB: Joe Berlaine used to work at the Sports Life, was it,> the bar on a hundred - - he was a bartender, he worked on the corner of 163<sup>rd</sup> Street and Third Avenue.*

MN: And what was the name of the bar?

BB: Sports Life, was it the Sports Life?

MN: I wouldn't know.

HW: Sports Lounge, is that it?

BB: No, I think it was the Sports Life.

MN: Ok, now did you, did your family have problems with you marrying an older man who was a bartender?

BB: [laughs] Yes, yes, but my mother liked him, and I thought I would be pleasing my mother, yes.

MN: Now, I assumed he must have been very handsome?

BB: He was considered handsome, I thought he was handsome, she thought he was handsome, yes.

MN: Ok, and he was very sociable and gracious?

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BB: Oh very sociable and gracious, he took me everywhere and he was so delightful. He taught me things about the street I didn't know and that was interesting to me. Right, but I never knew he used drugs.

MN: Now were you working at the time you met him?

BB: Yes, I was working 125<sup>th</sup> Street, I was secretary for Conrad J. Lyn, legal secretary.

MN: Was that the lawyer, Conrad Lyn?

BB: Yes, he was defending the Puerto Rican nationalists.

MN: He was an amazing - - that's an amazing - - I met him when I was at Columbia.

BB: Really?

MN: So you were his secretary, oh that must have been quite an experience!

BB: Yes, it was.

MN: Now did you get secretarial training at Morris?

BB: Exactly.

MN: So you - -

BB: Straight out of Morris High School I became Conrad J. Lyn's secretary.

MN: Well that's quite a story in itself, but for another time. But the heroin - - now did the two of you - - so you got married, did you have children?

BB: Yes, I have one daughter, Tony.

MN: And how soon did it become apparent that you had married a heroin addict?

BB: Oh it was about a few months. I began, while I was cleaning, I began to find needles and all the signs, all the drug paraphernalia, and I would ask him about it, and he would tell me little things. And I would show these things to my friend Hattie and she was like, "I told you." You know she really couldn't believe I had done something so stupid as to

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get married because she had warned me, she told me about this. He started using drugs, he was in the war in Japan and he was in - - he fought in Korea, and he started using drugs had started using drugs while he was in the army.

MN: And so what did that make you feel like when you suddenly realized what - -

BB: I was devastated, but we sat and we talked about it and he said he would go to Kentucky; they had a program in Kentucky, so he would go and he would get clean. But what happened you find out, I read everything I possibly could about drugs, and wanted to help him. So he went to Kentucky to get clean but each time he would go back and every time you get clean that makes you - - because he was doing it - - if a drug addict is getting himself clean to please someone else ok he's just clean for a period of time so that he can use again, so - -

MN: It doesn't work.

BB: Yes, exactly, so it didn't work. And so we were only married for about six months.

MN: Wow.

BB: Yes, six months of the time with him going back and forth to Kentucky, yes, so together about a year, but six months - -

MN: And then by that time you were expecting a child?

BB: No, Tony was born during this time, Tony was born, I had the baby already, right after the baby was born.

MN: Oh, ok. Now did you move back with your parents after this or you kept your own apartment?

BB: No I moved with my aunt to get myself together for about a few months. I moved in his mother's house because he was taking advantage of my aunt. I loved my aunt dearly,

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my aunt Dee, and I said this will not happen. He was going back to the old neighborhood bragging about how she was feeding him steaks everyday, and taking good care of him and he didn't have to pay rent. So the word got back to me so I said I will fix this lets go live with his mother so he can take advantage of his own mother, not my parents. So we moved into his parents' house which is the house on 164<sup>th</sup> Street, yes.

MN: Now, now - - wow. So what eventually happened to him? Did the drugs - -

BB: I put him out of his own house, ok. And I stayed at 164<sup>th</sup> Street and raised my daughter Tony.

MN: And did he still live in the area and come visit?

BB: No, no, I didn't see him again until my daughter was sixteen years old.

MN: Wow, oh.

BB: Yes, yes, it was a good separation as far as I'm concerned. He went his way and I went my way. I went to my friends and borrowed money. Each one of them, and paid each one back, for - - I remember for a whole week eating one of those big pretzels, the twisted pretzels with the - -

MN: The big ones, yes.

BB: Yes, yes, just so I could pay my friends back; three good friends. That was the story of Joe Berslaine. Yes, so I got away from him.

MN: Yes. Now when did you make the move into corrections? When was that?

BB: 1962.

MN: And so how did you make that transition from becoming a secretary and to - -

BB: When I went back to work, I worked as a - - I had to work immediately with Joe Berslaine gone. And I got a - - a friend downstairs, my same friend Hattie and Helen,

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taught me how to hold glasses, three glasses and plates, several plates, and got me a job as a waitress. I went there and they gave their phone numbers to add my experience, so I was able to go and work as a waitress on 59<sup>th</sup> Street; Ed Sullivan was my best customer there, it was a wonderful - - The Hamburger Barn, I worked there for lunch time while I was going to Hunter College. And when I left there I became a store detective, i went - - no I went to - - what's the name of that school - - oh, back then, policewoman training, Delahanty Institute. I went to the Delahanty Institute after Hunter, and that was the policewoman training. So going into police work first, then going into correction I - - no I became a store detective first. Ok that was how many years? Went into Corvette Chain and became a store detective, and the very week I became assistant manager Correction called me, yes that was 1962.

MN: And then you worked there for thirty years?

BB: Yes.

MN: And have you lived in the Bronx ever since?

BB: Exactly, sure.

MN: And when did you end up on Teller Ave?

BB: Around 1979.

MN: And you had been living in Tinton until then?

BB: No. I moved from Tinton Ave to 164<sup>th</sup> Street and Boston Road, right next to that park.

MN: Oh, right next to Charleton Garden?

BB: Right, my daughter used to go across the street to Dr. Benty, to - - what's the name of that community church, across the street? Right across the street. I wrote it down. Dr.

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Benty did wonderful things for children. He - - they went on all kinds of trips to - - my daughter grew up in that church across the street. What was the name of that church across the street? It's a community church - - right across from the park, 164<sup>th</sup> Street.

MN: Yes, yes Arch would know what it is. So - -

BB: Grace Gospel, Grace Gospel, they did great things, like the fire [indiscernible] Grace Gospel was there for activities for children in the neighborhood.

MN: And where did your daughter go to school, what schools did she go to in the Bronx?

BB: Tony went to - - oh boy, where did Tony go in the Bronx? Boy, why can't I remember where Tony went?

MN: Oh, don't worry about it.

BB: Isn't that strange?

MN: What high school did she go to?

BB: She, when we moved from 164<sup>th</sup> Street she went to Stuyvesant where we live now. Sixteen we moved from there. She was devastated because she didn't like moving, she loved 164<sup>th</sup> Street and all the people there, so she didn't like moving, she went to Stuyvesant and she hated it.

MN: She hated Stuyvesant high school? She must have been a great student to get into Stuyvesant.

BB: Yes, so where did Tony go to school? You know I don't know why I can't think of where my daughter went to school there. But she's listen - - she went to she moved from sixteen from high school she moved to Florida she went to school in Daytona Beach and then Miami. And she's a teacher now, she's married to a principal.

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MN: Down in, she lives in Florida?

BB: In Miami, yes.

MN: Ok well when - - did you remember, either of you, the fires that hit through the neighborhood of Morrisania and Hunt's Point and Kelly Street and all that. What was your - - your feeling when you saw the Bronx burning?

BB: We always heard that people were trying to get the insurance money and doing that to improve their stores. That's what I always heard, but I don't know, I don't know.

MN: Harriet, what did you hear; something similar?

HW: Similar, yes.

MN: Now, when did the two of you meet? What year for the first time?

BB: '80?

HW: We may have met in '80, but I think some of the dates are sort of incorrect, but we may have met around '80.

BB: I think '80.

MN: And now you met through the church?

HW: No, I met her before the church, I don't think she actually started at the church, excuse me, until nineteen eighty-something.

MN: Right, now where had you met prior to that?

BB: We had friends in common.

HW: Yes.

MN: Ok, I'm going to stop the formal part of this. Are there things that either of you want to say that you, now that you have an opportunity to put on record, either about your own life or the church or the Bronx? Harriet, you first. Anything you haven't had a

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chance to say in terms of looking back on all this? Let me just say from my point of view the church seems to be a really extraordinary and positive institution. You know here just - - well we should probably tell people, you live in Middletown, NY.

HW: Yes.

MN: And you still make this church the center of your life.

HW: Yes. Well that's because it's easy. I also worked at the post office on a 149<sup>th</sup> Street and Grand Concourse, and I drove back and forth to work five days a week from Middletown.

MN: Right, so how many years did you work in the post office?

HW: Twenty-six years.

MN: Ok, and what did you do before that? Was that your first job?

HW: I was just raising my children.

MN: Just raising your children, right. So you always worked in the post office in the Bronx?

HW: Yes.

MN: Now did you - - were you - - did you work in the post office or were you a letter carrier?

HW: I was one of the first female letter carriers in the Bronx in 1973. I think there was one other female letter carrier, Linda Caputo.

MN: Right, now that's - - whenever women pioneer something it is - - was there much hazing or was it a difficult thing to pioneer in doing that?

HW: Well every place you went people said, "Look a lady, a lady!" and everybody was just - -

MN: So it was fun?

HW: Yes, it was fun.

MN: Did you drive or you walked?

HW: I drove, I drove a regular mail truck, I drove a one ton mail truck. I also walked and did routes. And then I ended up in the office after having an injury on the job, I ended up working in the office.

MN: So it was very easy because you were commuting anyway?

HW: Yes.

MN: But now that you're retired why did you - - ok you live in Middletown, New York, which is not that close, you have to go across the Tappan Zee up there - -

HW: 75 miles.

MN: Its 75 miles. So you, you're not only a member of a church you're a chairperson of the board. I mean what keeps fueling the engine? You know that makes you so deeply attached to this institution?

HW: I enjoy what I'm doing. I love the people; I love the pastor; and I just have never found another church as organized that does so much for so many people, so it makes it all worthwhile.

MN: Oh, wow. And Beatrice, the things that you haven't said here that you'd like to say.

BB: I enjoy the same passion, I have the same passion with my church, but I wanted to mention something about my childhood on Tinton Avenue.

MN: Ok.

Interviewees: Beatrice Berglaine & Harriet Waites

Interviewer: Dr. Mark Naison; Bronx, NY

BB: You know there were times on Saturday, and we would go to the movies, and you could stay in the movies all day. Do you remember we had the matrons to watch the kids; we were talking about the safety.

MN: Right.

BB: Right, so there was a section where you would sit and the matrons would watch us all day and the parents didn't have to worry about it.

MN: Wow, so you could stay the whole day in the movies, seeing cartoons and features -  
-

BB: Yes, exactly the news, the cartoons, two features. You know the RKO Franklin, the Loews's Berlin, there was a Prospect Theatre - - yes, for little or nothing and get a free Dixie cup and a free bank and you could stay all day long and your parents didn't have to worry about you

MN: Yes, so, that's interesting. Because it seems like kids had more back then than they do now in terms of supervision.

BB: Yes.

MN: Did you ever go to PS 99 after-school center?

BB: Oh sure, oh yes, that was a must. You went after school to dance - -

MN: Ok, now somebody talked about the "grind them up dances"?

BB: There was the grind, there was the grind.

MN: Now tell me a little about the grind, we need to have - -

BB: You would only grind if the lights were turned down low, you had to - -

MN: Now they actually turned the lights down low?

BB: The lights were turned down low - -

HW: Or they used color lights.

BB: Color lights, right.

MN: Blue lights or red lights - -

BB: Both.

MN: What were some good songs to grind to back in the day?

BB: I wish I could remember, I wish I could remember.

MN: So you actually had dances after school?

BB: You would dance close, yes, you would dance close with a boy and there was the grind, yes.

HW: And you'd hear people say, "They call me coffee because I grind so fine" yes.

[Laughter]

MN: They call me coffee because I grind so fine, ok. Now Arthur Crier mentioned talent shows in the evening there?

HW: Oh yes, oh yes.

MN: What were those like?

BB: Wonderful!

MN: Did you ever perform at - -

BB: Oh yes, yes I would sing, I would sing - - They didn't like my voice too - -

MN: Now did you sing in a group or did you sing individually?

BB: Always in a group, Jean Martin, Gene Red, myself we're all Barsticks, see Great Gene's father worked for Al Borough Barsticky, playing vibes, so he was very popular and everybody wanted to stick to him because you know that was an in, because his father was a well known musician.

Interviewees: Beatrice Berglaid & Harriet Waites

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MN: So you would sing in a group, what was - -

BB: Back-up singer only.

MN: Back-up singer, you never sang solo?

BB: I - - they didn't like my voice well enough for solo, they liked Jean Martin's voice, she was like a soprano.

MN: Oh so Jean Martin was a girl?

BB: She was a girl, Gene Red was the one that was my boyfriend.

MN: Right. Now were there any performers in those talent shows who really stood out to you? That somebody who just - -

BB: Arthur Crier was always - - you know we we we loved each other so much and respected our talents. Arthur could make up a song like this. [snaps fingers]

MN: Wow.

BB: Yes, he could make up a song - - and he had a good voice. Gary, Gary - - boy I wish I could think of Gary's name. Deep bass, bass voice, he was great. Rupert Ranker - -

MN: Now somebody mentioned there was one Jewish kid living in the neighborhood who performed at those shows, I don't know if it was maybe earlier or later, maybe it was later.

BB: He probably wouldn't have stood out to me because I didn't think about in terms of race then.

MN: Well that's right in those days you didn't think about race.

BB: You really didn't, no, everybody was your friend, yes.

MN: Who were the teachers in those after-school centers? Because somebody mentioned a Mr. Tibbs, who was like - - is there any teacher - -

Interviewees: Beatrice Berglaid & Harriet Waites

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BB: He was in charge he was at night he was in the evening at one of the centers and he was like a protector and yes. But I don't remember anyone else there.

MN: So you had the movies, you had the after school programs, there was a lot of supervision, there were a lot of adults looking out for you if you were going off somebody would - - like this amazing woman Mrs. Walker - -

BB: Yes.

MN: - - who took you aside and you know, so that's - -

BB: Exactly.

MN: Do you sometimes feel like kids growing up today in the Bronx don't have what you did growing up, or that there's something missing? Or is it more in the family?

BB: The something missing is in their parents.

MN: So you think that it's the family's the biggest difference?

BB: I think so.

MN: What are some of the things today, in the family, that is lacking, that was there?

BB: What I see lacking is in the parents, I don't see parents knowing enough to teach their children, their lacking in etiquette, they're lacking in things that just came so easily to us, that we were taught in school that they just don't seem to be learning anymore, yes.

MN: Now, does the church work with people on parenting? Is that something - - have you ever done parenting classes for the younger parents in the community?

BB: Not exactly parenting, but we have a marvelous ministry for teens. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Ministry. Yes, we have a ministry for just about every aspect.

HW: Single parents, social hours.

Interviewees: Beatrice Berglaid & Harriet Waites

Interviewer: Dr. Mark Naison; Bronx, NY

MN: Now these are all created by the church or are they part of the Community

Churches Organization?

HW: The church.

BB: Most of these ministries were created by the Pastor Emeritus William E. Thompson.

The last few ministries were created by Starling T. Chern, our present pastor.

MN: Ok, so in other words all of these different programs that you have were generated within the church?

BB: Yes, yes.

MN: Wow. So there's a ministry to teens, a ministry to senior citizens, and the ministry to the community in Ghana that you worked with - -

BB: Exactly.

MN: And you have less - - how do you do this with a congregation of 300 people?

BB: We each have - - there's a job for everyone.

MN: So if you're going to join this church - -

BB: Come prepared!

HW: You automatically belong to one of these ministries.

MN: It's almost like everybody's expected to be active. This is not a congregation where you sit back, make your contribution and just - -

BB: Exactly. If you were to join our church tomorrow and you were to think of a ministry there would be room for you. Maybe you'll think of something that we don't have now.

MN: So its people - - its like people who are attracted to this and people who want to give back to the community and want to do something in the world that's constructive.

BB: I would say so.

MN: It would sound like it would have to be given how many things you're doing.

BB: Yes.

HW: But there's always one or two that - - who will do nothing.

MN: Are the younger people just as active as you are or not quite?

BB: Not quite, not quite. And there are people who just come to church and go home now, right, there are those too. It isn't everybody who is so active but we have twenty-three ministries just about that are.

HW: And those that are not actually active and have already been placed in one of the ministries, even if they're not active if the ministry is giving an affair they could contribute toward it financially or - -

MN: So if you're not going to give of your body, you're expected to give something, time or money.

BB: Yes, time or talents.

MN: Ok, anything else that you haven't said, I mean this is again anything that comes to your mind to put on record because this is going to be - - a lot of people are going to read and watch this.

HW: I just think that one of the most amazing ministries that we have is our Martin Luther King, Jr. Ministry because the past has taught us to bond and reverse. By that we mean when you're growing up your parents and elders take care of you so now that you're a teenager you're being taught to take care of your elders and I think that that's really, really good.

BB: I agree with that, yes.

Interviewees: Beatrice Berglaid & Harriet Waites

Interviewer: Dr. Mark Naison; Bronx, NY

MN: Ok, well thank you very much this was a very special and wonderful occasion.

HW: Thank you.

BB: Well thank you for the opportunity to explain and talk about our past, and go on this adventure. This was an adventure, a nostalgic venture; you made me dig deep into the past and think about good times, and some not so good times.

MN: Good, good, yes, absolutely, ok great.

[END OF SESSION]