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Transcriber: Angela Dugan

Mark Naison (MN): Hello this is the 67th interview of the Bronx African American History Project. Here with us is Candace Smith who grew up in the Patterson Houses, attended Lehman College and is now an assistant district attorney in Los Angeles, California. To begin with, when did your family first move to the Bronx?

Candace Smith (CS): I believe it was in 1957.

MN: And where were they living before then?

CS: Before then we were living in a private home on the top floor, I'm trying to remember the street of what it was - -I can't remember the name of the street now, I was 7 or 8 years old.

MN: Was it in Manhattan?

CS: No it was in the Bronx.

MN: Oh you were [unclear]

CS: It was in the Bronx. It was in a residential area, I want to say near Tremont, it was a predominantly Jewish neighborhood I know that. Yes.

MN: Right and you were living in a private home.

CS: Yes and we were living in I guess you could call a two family home.

MN: Right.

CS: We had the top floor apartment.

MN: Yes. Before your family was there did they ever live in Manhattan?

CS: No I've never lived in Manhattan.

MN: Did your parents ever live in Manhattan?

CS: As far as I know they didn't. They lived in the Bronx, yes.

MN: Now where were they from originally?

CS: My mother was born in Mobile, Alabama but she came here at 2 years old, so she had no memory of Mobile so she was basically raised here in the Bronx and so did my father. They both graduated from Morris High School.

MN: Oh wow, so they're both Morris graduates.

CS: Right.

MN: And both grew up in the Bronx.

CS: Yes.

MN: And they were both Southerners.

CS: No, my father's family is from St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands. My grandparents - -my paternal grandparents came from St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, before I was born. My father was born here in New York.

MN: So your father's family is from the Virgin Islands, your mother's from Alabama.

CS: Yes my mother's family is from Mobile, Alabama.

MN: Now did you when you were growing up visit either the South or the Virgin Islands?

CS: Actually, unfortunately no I never visited Mobile. My grandmother took me to St. Thomas, I think I was a sophomore in college. That had to be around 1970's - -no actually probably 1968, '69.

MN: So the connection to the place where your parents were originally from wasn't a big part of your childhood?

CS: Not in the sense of actually going there, but I think in the sense of just cultural, just my culture. It was a pretty Southern cultural upbringing I guess in terms of the food and I realized that more when I visited certain places in the South like New Orleans where I was able to just feel very comfortable about seeing things that I grew up with.

MN: So you think the Southern influence was stronger in your family than the Caribbean influence?

CS: Only because my parents divorced when I was very young, so I grew up with my mother. But when I visited my grandmother, the West Indian influence was very strong because I went to a lot of West Indian dances and picnics with her, and she cooked a lot of West Indian food. So I would say only because on a daily basis I lived with my mother –

MN: Right.

CS: but I had a very strong West Indian influence also.

MN: So your paternal grandmother remained a force in your life after your parents divorced.

CS: Very close to my maternal grandmother and my paternal grandmother. They were very strong women who had very strong influences on me as a child. I traveled with my paternal grandmother. She was the one I think who exposed me to a lot. She took me to Broadway plays, I traveled with her, I remember her taking me to Canada, to Ohio, she took me to the Virgin Islands so I spent a lot of summers with her, so I would have to say both of them were very strong influences in my life.

MN: Now how many siblings did you have?

CS: Both of my parents remarried when I was very young. My mother remarried when I was seven, and from her second union I have a sister - -I have three sisters. My father also remarried and from that union I have a sister and two brothers.

MN: Right. Now when you were growing up, how old were you when your parents divorced?

CS: Before I was 5, I would say.

MN: Before you were 5.

MN: Right, yes.

MN: When did your - -I guess it was your - -did both parents move to the Patterson houses, or was it your mother?

CS: My mother and my stepfather.

MN: Your mother and your stepfather.

CS: Right.

MN: And that was nineteen fifty –

CS: 57.

MN: 57.

CS: Yes.

MN: And how old were you at that time?

CS: Eight years old.

MN: Eight years old. What were - -so what elementary school did you go to when you were living on, I guess it was the Tremont section?

CS: I think I went to a public school for awhile. No actually, you know it's really funny, I know I went to 1st and 2nd grade - -I was going to St. Anthony of Padua in the South Bronx.

MN: When you were in 1st and 2nd grade.

CS: Yes that was around one hundred sixty something street and Prospect Avenue.

MN: Yes, yes.

CS: And then I remember just for a short period of time in 3rd grade I went to a public school. It was in that area that I told you, I think it was Tremont, I can't remember the name - -for some reason it just slipped my memory, I'll probably remember it, the street we lived on in the Bronx. But once we moved to the Patterson projects, I went to St. Pius, yes.

MN: Now when your family moved to the Patterson Houses, was this considered a step up, was it something they looked forward to, or was it something they were worried about?

CS: I think it was considered a step up because we were living in - -I want to say, I'm trying to remember the apartment, I don't even know. I'm thinking it's what you would consider a very huge studio apartment. It was more like a partition. I remember it was just me at the time, and my mother and my stepfather. And then my sister was born, and at that time when she was born, obviously we needed more room, and that's when we moved into the Patterson projects.

MN: So moving to the Patterson meant you got more space, and each of you had your own room.

CS: Right, because I remember also in the house we were living in we shared a kitchen with another - -I guess it was like a boarding house situation.

MN: Oh so it was a boarding house situation.

CS: Right, because I remember it was another couple that lived a room down the hallway, and we shared the same kitchen facilities.

MN: What sort of work - -did your mother work?

CS: No my mother was a housewife, a homemaker.

MN: Yes, and what sort of work did your father and stepfather do?

CS: He worked for the post office.

MN: Your father.

CS: Yes, my biological father whom I did not live with was a New York City police officer. My stepfather who I lived with worked for the United States Post Office.

MN: Right. Now were you brought up Catholic from the beginning?

CS: Yes, I was baptized Catholic at St. Anthony of Padua. That was sort of the family church on my father's side of the family. They were Catholic, and I think my parents were married there, and I was baptized there, and I went to school there for the first two grades or something.

MN: Right, so your mother had grown up Protestant but converted?

CS: Actually she did, yes, but she did not convert to Catholicism until my two younger sisters were old enough to go - -I think she wanted them to go to Catholic school also because they were very strict back then in those days, in terms of you had to be Catholic to go to a parochial school. So I remember at some point in time her converting to Catholicism, and my sisters going to Catholic elementary school.

MN: Right, now was your stepfather Catholic?

CS: No he was not.

MN: So that meant that she had to convert --

CS: Yes she did --

MN: in order - - since one parent had to be Catholic.

CS: Yes, right.

MN: What were your earliest memories - -well let's go back to the neighborhood you lived in before. Did you play in the street a lot when you were growing up?

CS: Yes I did. I remember my best friend was an Italian girl, her name was Phyllis, and I think we were both overweight, we were both fat. [laughter] So we kind of bonded, and I remember very vaguely always being out in the street playing.

MN: And this was a multi-racial area? It was predominantly white?

CS: It was predominantly white, yes. As far as I remember I may have been the only Black person on the block. I can't remember any children of color, other than me, that I played with, yes.

MN: Right, and it was - -do you remember any of the street games you played?

CS: Back then no, no, not really, no.

MN: Okay so when you moved to Patterson, what were your feelings when you first got there?

CS: I don't remember any particular feelings when I got there, I just remember how it looked. An interesting thing was we lived - -we moved within the Patterson as the family got larger. I think the first apartment we lived in must have been a two bedroom.

MN: Right and what building was your first?

CS: I remember that was on Willis Avenue. I can't remember the - -it was in the Patterson projects and we basically just moved up a long block. We were on one corner, and I'm thinking that may have been Willis Avenue. I know we moved eventually, walking up a very long block to 325 East 143rd and then it was on Third Avenue. It was like from corner to corner.

MN: Right.

CS: That's the only thing I really remember about that. In terms of - -my mother was very strict with me growing up. I remember going out, playing ropes with my friends, but I could never be out after dark. Even in the summertime I have vague memories of looking at my friends playing outside the window, and I couldn't be outside. Whenever it got dark I had to be in the house.

MN: Right.

CS: I remember sitting on the bench a lot, playing with my friends, playing rope, talking,

MN: Now most of the friends you made went to public school, or did the other kids go to Catholic school as well?

CS: Well that's an interesting I do remember. I remember being teased and basically ostracized, you know how kids are, because I went to Catholic school. You wear that funny looking uniform. My closest friend - -I had friends, but my closest friend was a girl named Barbara Connard, she lived in the same building with me and we both went to Catholic school. And another girl named Carmen. Those were my three close friends that I did everything with from I guess pre-teens up until teenage years, up until I graduated from high school. As I said, my mother was very strict, so I wasn't allowed

out to roam the streets or when I was in the projects, I had to stay basically right underneath the window where she could see me.

MN: Right so she - -you were told you needed to be inside.

CS: Yes and it was funny - -I think Bubba Dukes was reminding me of a few things. I was laughing and he's like yes, she was the Catholic school girl and I started laughing, and I said, yes I remember when you guys used to tease me about that. I always get teased because I guess my mother's security with me was as I got older into my teens, I couldn't go anyplace without my little sisters, and it was an eight year old difference between me and my next sister --

MN: That's a lot yes, yes --

CS: So they would call me the train because I would walk down the street and it was my two little sisters and my cousin, who also lived with us, and they'd be right behind me. So they'll say, here comes the train, here she comes with the train behind her. [laughter] So they'd call me shopping cart because I was always going to the store everyday with my mother's shopping cart, so she had these little kids in the house, it helped her out a lot in terms of going to the store and running a lot of errands.

MN: Now was academics emphasized in your household?

CS: Extremely, extremely. It was extreme. I was an honor student all through school. I remember in high school, my cousin laughing if I got a C in math and I was under punishment until I brought it up to a B. Punishment wasn't much because I couldn't go out [laughter], so punishment was I couldn't watch tv [laughs] until I got my grades up. Yes, so it was very strongly encouraged.

MN: Now did your mother read? Were books a part of your household?

CS: It's interesting you bring that up because I have a niece who's a junior now, and I was telling her since I couldn't go out a lot, my cousin and I - -another cousin I have that was close with, that was a big deal to us. We would go to - -during the summer months, I guess prior to my teens, like pre-teens, we would go to a library practically everyday and I remember I was friends with the librarian.

MN: Now where was the library located?

CS: That's what I don't remember. I don't remember, I remember walking to it, but I can't remember exactly where it was. I would go at least every other day. I would take out books and get a new bunch of books, and come back home and read them. So we read all the time. Even my mother, I remember, she read a lot. Once she put the kids to bed at night she would sit on the couch and read a book.

MN: Were political discussions part of your household that you can remember? Did people talk about --

CS: Yes, yes.

MN: And what sort of issues were being talked about?

CS: Well I guess the time I grew up, Civil Rights was predominant, so we talked about Civil Rights a lot. I remember very clearly when President Kennedy was running for President, and that was a big deal because I was Catholic and I went to a Catholic school. But yes, Civil Rights were brought up a lot, and I do remember - -and I started reading the paper at a very young age and I remember asking my mother questions in terms of what I read in the papers.

MN: Did your mother ever talk about the South to you, or she left when she was too young to remember anything?

CS: Yes I think - -my grandmother lived with us from the time - -my grandmother was in my life constantly.

MN: This is your maternal grandmother?

CS: My maternal grandmother, because when my mother and my father separated we lived with her.

MN: Okay.

CS: And then maybe there was a two year span when we didn't live with her, and then I remember when I was ten, she came to live with us. So she lived with me most of her life.

MN: And she had grown up in Mobile?

CS: Yes, and she would go visit. She would go back every year.

MN: Did she ever talk about what it was like there?

CS: A little, yes. She would talk, yes. She would say things like everyone spoke there, everyone always spoke and said hello. And she basically said, in terms of Blacks and Whites, everybody basically knew their place, basically. It was never any - -she felt like Caucasian people in the North were a little more disingenuous. You never really knew what they were thinking. [unclear] In the South, you were basically mute, you knew where you were, and you were just mute.

MN: When you moved to the Patterson Houses, were there many White families left, or that was a fairly small presence in the community?

CS: I don't remember any. I don't remember any White people in the Patterson when I was there.

MN: By '57 the --because people who moved there in 1950 --so by '57 there were very few if any whites?

CS: I cannot remember, to my knowledge, any White people living in my neigh --

MN: Right.

CS: Puerto Rican people, but not White people.

MN: Now where --

CS: In school, now when I went to school I was the only Black person in my class.

MN: What was that like because that was a predominantly Irish neighborhood?

CS: Right. I [unclear] remember very distinctively, my mother bringing me to school the first day and the nun bringing me up to my class and when she opened the door and I remember looking around the class and I saw nothing but White faces. And I went and sat down, and when I went home the next day --that afternoon I said to my mother, I said mommy, I'm the only colored one in my class. And she goes, well you know I guess you're going to have to make friends. And I go, yeah okay. So I went to school the next day and did that.

MN: And it wasn't a big deal.

CS: I was always very aware of it, but it wasn't a big deal. I always made friends very easily and it was like that all through elementary --it was even interesting, the school I decided to go to for high school was predominantly Irish and Italian --

MN: That was at --

CS: That's St. Pius V High School.

MN: That was at St. Pius High School.

CS: Right, but there were other schools - -I could've gone to Cathedral or something which was little –

MN: Now St. Pius was in the Bronx or Manhattan?

CS: St. Pius was also - - it was in walking distance from my house. It was between 143rd and 149th and Third Avenue.

MN: Right, now so is that high school still there.

CS: Good question. I think it is, but I don't know for sure.

MN: Right and I can check on that [crosstalk].

CS: Something I need to do.

MN: That was a girls' Catholic high school.

CS: Yes it was an all-girls Catholic high school

MN: And was that the sister school of Cardinal Hayes or something, or not quite?

CS: I don't know, I guess so. I don't know if it was that one. I think Cathedral may have been. I'm sorry, I need to speak into the mic. It's interesting again, at my father's funeral - -my stepfather, who I also call my father - -my sister's ex-husband, his younger sister and I went to high school together. I think I was a senior when she was a freshman, or I was at least two or three years older, and he was talking just a few weeks ago - -he was saying, yes I was looking for the yearbook and it was like the Candy yearbook because I was class president and every other picture on the page was a picture of me, and I was the only Black or African-American person in my class at that time - -I think actually in the whole senior class.

MN: Yes, so you were able to move pretty effortlessly back and forth from an all-Black public housing environment to an all-White Catholic school environment.

CS: Yes, and I think it's really helped me throughout life, being able to feel very comfortable around most groups of people.

MN: And whatever teasing you got, you could handle pretty easily.

CS: I never got teasing in terms of race or anything, that never happened.

MN: Yes, it was more just Catholic school you wear uniforms - -

CS: Yes, that was only in the projects [laughter]. That didn't happen at school.

MN: Right, okay. Now did you notice as you were growing up any changes in the Patterson Houses that made it a less healthier, less safe place?

CS: Well I think like any place in New York, there was always an element of - -you just had to be careful, like any place else. I lived on the 9th floor, my mother would tell me to be careful of this, be careful of that. I do remember - -we didn't move out of there until I was in my senior year of college, so I was in my early 20's.

MN: So that would be - -

CS: It was in 1971.

MN: So you moved out in 1971.

CS: Right, I grew up there. But I think because - -I remember there was a drug influence. I remember a lot of seeing different people I grew up with being strung out on heroin.

MN: And that's in the 60's.

CS: Yes, 60's.

MN: Middle 60's.

CS: Middle 60's, yes. The 60's into the early 70's. But I remember distinctly one time coming home from a party, I'm in college now, and I guess I decided we're going to take

a cab, I must've decided to take the train because I remember us walking home, it was like 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. And there were a group of guys out on the corner. And they didn't bother me, they were like oh be careful [unclear] what are you doing out this late. You know they were pretty protective of people they knew because they knew me and they grew up with me, so I never felt any particular danger of anyone that I knew, but like anyplace else you had to be careful. I remember my mother telling me, be careful when you get on the elevator, don't take the elevator with strangers, and things like that.

MN: Was the environment pretty sex or gender segregated, or did you have friends that were guys as well as friends that were girls?

CS: Yes, I did. I had both - -guy and girl friends. And as I said, of course there were different things. For instance, when [unclear] in the summer, usually in the winter you're not out that much anyway, but in the summer we'd play rope, or sit on the bench and listen to music, or go watch the guys play basketball.

MN: Now did you go to P.S. 18? Where did you watch the basketball games mostly?

CS: Normally on the basketball courts within the projects. There was a big basketball court –

MN: Right, right.

CS: Yes, so right there I would watch the basketball games.

MN: Now did you have any artistic activity that you engaged in?

CS: Unfortunately no. [laughs]

MN: Because you weren't a music person or –

CS: No, no. I wasn't very physically active. I kind of wished my mother [unclear]. As I said I was overweight until I was about a pre-teen and my mother.

BREAK IN TAPE

CS: I can't believe I remembered all of that.

MN: Yes, right.

CS: Did I know you I don't know?

UNKNOWN: Probably didn't.

MN: So –

CS: You look kind of familiar.

UNKNOWN: I do?

CS: Yes you do. I was saying - -that's probably why you didn't recognize me - -I was - - number one my family's last name was Gay, although my last name was Floy and I guess people who didn't go to school with me wouldn't know what my last name was and it was very few of us that went to the Catholic school, so they wouldn't know me by whatever last name I used now versus my family's last name which was Gay. As I was saying, in terms of being in the arts or physically, because I think I was overweight and I wasn't that physically active in any sort of sports or anything.

MN: Now did you ever go to the P.S. 18 center - -the afternoon center and night center?

CS: No.

MN: So you didn't go to any - -did you ever go to the community center in the Patterson?

CS: No my mother was pretty strict with me, I don't think. If I did I don't remember. I just don't remember.

MN: So you went to school, and then you played outside the building in sight - -

CS: Yes, yes. That was basically it. [laughs]

MN: Now when you reached adolescence, were you allowed to date?

CS: Yes - -no - -let me - -oh this is hilarious, it's funny. I think my mother's rules were at the time, at fifteen I could have company, I couldn't go out on a date, but they could come to the house, and sixteen you could start going out. And at the time my boyfriend was Bobby Avery, did you know Bobby Avery? See she - -I remember you, I do remember - -what's your name again?

UNKNOWN: Adrian, they call me Skippy.

CS: Skippy, I do remember you. Yes, yes

UNKNOWN: Bubba Dukes and I were friends.

CS: Yes I remember you, I remember you. Yes so, [unclear] and I laugh when I tell my friends this. So yes, the thing was you could have company at 15, except you're living in this 2 bedroom, 3 bedroom apartment, so the guy comes to your house and you're sitting there in the middle of the living room, and your three little sisters, and your mother, and everybody's sitting there. [laughter] And so you're having company. But anyway, my first boyfriend was Bobby Avery.

MN: Now where did you meet him?

CS: Just around the projects, just you know. [laughs]

MN: Now this -

CS: And he had a sister named Yvette, and I knew his sister Yvette, yes. [laughs]

MN: Were there house parties that people were having so you could meet people in that way, was it more meeting - -

CS: Yes, well they had them but I couldn't go to them. [laughs]

MN: Because when I was - -it was very - -we were doing something with people who grew up in the Morris High School area, and they were describing what they called the slow grinds at the junior high - -at the night center at P.S. 99.

CS: Yes, I got to those when I was in college.

MN: Oh so you didn't - -

CS: Yes, I was kind of a late bloomer.

MN: You weren't at 13 and 14 -

CS: No, no please, no not at all. I couldn't even get - -like I said when it was dark I was up in the house. That's why Skippy doesn't even remember me. [laughter]

MN: So you were - -now was this a Southern tradition, these words, keeping company. Was this how Southern family - -was this something?

CS: I would, yes I would assume yes. That's just rules that we grew up with. [laughs]

MN: Yes. Now one of the things that Patricia Payne and Marilyn Russell were talking about - -she said that very quietly there were girls in Patterson who were getting pregnant.

CS: Oooh yes, that was a big deal. It was like every summer you would go outside to see who got pregnant that year. That was a big deal, that was a big deal. It was like to see who - -and especially being young teenager girls too, that was like oh, and then you go upstairs and you know for us that was like the biggest deal in the world to talk about that and to find out who it was -

MN: Were any of these, the people who this happened to, people that were part of your social circle?

CS: In a way yes, one of them was, it was so funny - -do you remember Barbara

Connard?

UNKNOWN: Oh yes.

CS: Yes, Barbara was my best friend. See Barbara and I were always together.

UNKNOWN: And Ray?

CS: Yes, yes.

UNKNOWN: Yes.

CS: Barbara Connard was my best friend, and her really good friend was a girl named Terry, and I can't remember Terry's last name now. And so the three of us would be together a lot, and I remember at 16, Barbara telling me that Terry was pregnant. I think they may have been a little more than a year over me. She was a little older than me. And I remember that time muu-muu dresses were in style and she was trying to hide it with a muu-muu dress. So I remember she came to my house, the two of them, and we would - -you know whatever teenage girls were talking and everything, and I remember when they left my mother said, Candy, Terry's pregnant isn't she. And I was like, yes mom she is.

MN: Now did your mother ever talk to you about sex, was that part - -or was it part of the people who threw you a book and said read this.

CS: Well, she - -we had - -she talked to me about sex in terms of don't do it, number one, in terms of what to do not to get pregnant. I knew what she used in terms of her birth control method, but I always remember very, and I laugh about this too - -we had basic conversation. It was more don't get pregnant, etc. But I do remember, again my best girl friend Barbara Connard, she was a year ahead of me. She's six months older

than me, but a year ahead of me in school, so she graduated from high school the year before I did, and she was getting married at 18, and I remember my mother bringing her into her bedroom and closing the door, when she wanted to talk to her about birth control. But she wouldn't let me come in the room and I was up a wall like whatever. [laughs] So even at that age, I was like 17 and she wasn't going to give me any encouragement in terms of what to do not to get pregnant. It was more with her, don't do it.

MN: Did the girls in your circle talk to each other about what was going on?

CS: Yes, yes.

MN: So there was you know - -

CS: Yes, yes.

MN: So there was a female culture which was pretty frank?

CS: Yes, yes, yes.

MN: Now when you were - - were you told that your goal was to get married by your mother or was she more interested in you getting your education first?

CS: First, an education. It was just drilled in my head that I was going to college and that was it. But when I - - I remember when I was 18, I was getting ready to graduate, she told me I had three choices: you can either go to school, you can get married, or get a job, but you're not going to sit around here and do anything. But it was just basically always understood - - actually I went through most of high school thinking I was going to be a registered nurse so I think in my junior year I was visiting all these nursing schools. And then I decided I was going to go to Hunter and get my B.S. in nursing, and I was accepted into Hunter, and the day I got the admission letter I decided, I don't think I want to do this, I don't think I want wear a uniform, I don't like blood, I want to be on a

campus. So at the time, Lehman was still Hunter, so I just called them up and said could I switch to a liberal arts program at the Bronx campus, and that's what I did.

MN: Now you were at Lehman in the middle, late 60's?

CS: I started Lehman in '67.

MN: In '67. Was that an exciting time to go to school?

CS: Oh I loved it. Even now, to this day, I'm thinking - - the 60's were a very exciting time. You don't hear anything happening now that was happening then. That was when I had my first taste of freedom, I just really felt that I was to basically do - -my mother kind of dropped the strings of that, the reigns at that point. I could go and come when I wanted to.

MN: Now what were the things that most excited you intellectually, culturally at that time?

CS: Well it was interesting going to Lehman after coming out of an all-girls Catholic school. And all of a sudden I saw this group of Black people, and I was the only black one in my class for 12 years, and right away I remember joining the Black Students Union. I wasn't interested in joining a sorority, and that was basically my whole support group through the 4 years I was there. Because even in my classes, at that time I think there was only less than 1 percent Black students in Hunter-Lehman at that time.

MN: Right.

CS: So even when I went to class, I was still the only Black student in the class, or maybe one other - -me and one other. So I remember the big thing was every, at every break we'd go to the Students Union in the lunchroom and that's where we would hang out and have meetings and everything.

MN: Were there any teachers you had at Lehman that were particularly memorable, had a particular influence on you?

CS: I don't know in terms of influence, but I remember Jenny Siegel, who was the author J.E. Franklin, was my African-American Education Studies teacher. So I remember her very clearly. I can't think of any other teacher or instructor that I really remember at this point that still stands out in my mind.

MN: Now back at the Patterson, were people becoming politically active back there? Were there any people who were joining the Panthers, or the Nation of Islam, or other - - that you saw visible there? You could also kick in on that one.

UNKNOWN: Yes my brother joined the Nation of Islam [unclear], for a short time. But that didn't last very long. My other brothers didn't really get that politically active. And Arnold went to Lehman.

CS: Yes, no. Not that I knew of at that time.

MN: It wasn't something like people were out in front of the building selling the Black Panther paper - -

CS: Oh no, no.

MN: Or *Muhammed Speaks*.

CS: Maybe *Muhammed Speaks* you would see - -

UNKNOWN: *Muhammed Speaks* sold all over the place

CS: But not the Black Panthers. Yes that was all over.

UNKNOWN: Remember, did you ever get into *Pa'lante* which was the Young Lords paper?

CS: No.

UNKNOWN: Because they were selling that in the neighborhood too.

CS: No I don't remember that one. Yes, but I do remember the Young Lords.

MN: Now is this where you decided to be a teacher at Lehman?

CS: Yes, yes, yes.

MN: And was there an education major that you could do?

CS: At that time I was a socio - - you had to minor in education, so I was a sociology major and an education minor.

MN: Now did you go to any demonstrations or marches at this time?

CS: Yes, I think yes. The ones we had at school. I remember we were running around locking up - -we were doing something crazy - -locking up the buildings, some demonstration. [laughs]

MN: At that time, did you have to get a Master's to start teaching or did you right into the schools after graduating?

CS: No, no you were able to start with your B.A. and then get your Masters - -get a provisional license to say you got the permit. I had my Master's by '75, I think.

MN: Right, now what was your first teaching job?

CS: Actually, it was so funny because I remember in February, and I was supposed to graduate in May, that's when - -clearly the headlines in the paper, New York City School System axes so many thousands of teachers so, I'm boo-hooing, crying, I'm not going to get a job. And I remember when I graduated, I was trying to get a job in some of the hospitals as a social worker, however they had just built a new daycare center right there on 169th and Fulton, Fulton Daycare Center, so that was my first teaching job. I taught there as an assistant - - as a teacher, but I was teaching pre-school, 4 year olds.

MN: Right.

CS: And I think I did that for 2 years. I was promoted to Assistant Director. I had to do that from '71, until at least '73, '74. Then I went and worked across the street at C.E.S.

2. And I was there from --

MN: C.E.S. it means?

CS: I don't know. They changed it from P.S. to C.S.

MN: Oh that was an elementary school?

CS: Yes it was an elementary school, yes.

MN: Okay so you went from the pre-school to the elementary school.

CS: Yes and I taught there for 5 years before I went to Bermuda.

MN: And then you moved to Bermuda?

CS: Yes, my former husband, now ex-husband was Bermudian, and I moved to Bermuda with him.

MN: Now was he Bronx-Bermudian or Bermudian?

CS: No he lived in Bermuda. He was Bermudian.

MN: So where'd you end up meeting him?

CS: On vacation in Bermuda.

MN: Oh okay. And then you moved there to join him.

CS: Yes, yes, yes.

MN: And what did your mother think of this?

CS: Well my mother died in 1972.

MN: Oh okay.

CS: No, my father, and my biological father, and my stepfather, and my gran - -they were all very upset, because I just came home one day and announced I was moving to Bermuda, but it worked out for me because I had been trying to get a job down there, and by then I had my Master's degree, so I wanted to get a job as a reading specialist down there and they needed reading teachers. And at first they had declined my application, and then I went down there when I was down there to speak to the Minister of Education, and he said he had just pulled up my resume again because they had an opening and he was going to contact me. So I interviewed for the job and I got it, and then so I was just going back home to pack to move down there, but the interesting thing was the same day that I was resigning from the New York City School Board, I had a pink slip in the mail because they were laying teachers off again. This was in '75 I think.

MN: Oh the Fiscal Crisis.

CS: Yes, the Fiscal Crisis. So it worked out very well for me that I moved at that time, and I had another job.

MN: Now where - -when you - -where had you been living in New York after you left the Patterson Houses?

CS: 3329 Hudson Avenue, my family's still there. It's in North Bronx near Co-op City -

MN: Oh okay.

CS: Right near Baychester Avenue.

MN: Right, now was - -.

CS: My parents bought a house there.

MN: Oh it was a house. And what year did they buy - in seventy -

CS: 1971. The month before I graduated, same month I graduated from Lehman.

MN: Now when you left the Patterson Houses, was this a place that a lot of the people you grew up with wanted to get out of? Was it - -do you see a big difference between what Patterson was like in '57 and what it was like in '71?

CS: You know what, I don't think I really saw a big difference then, and it wasn't - -and in terms of getting out, it was only in terms of growing up, and of course you think about doing things; like you want your own apartment. It was really great that my parents were buying a house, and I was going to have my own room and everything. So in that respect, but I don't think it was in the sense of getting out of the Patterson projects, it was more a sense of just going to another - -reaching another goal in life in terms of buying a house. Now I did go - -once I left there, actually I was living in California at the time. I remember in 1978, I went to Evelyn Parker, still one of my closest friends, and I think she was still living there and I was in New York and I think I had to meet her at 149th and 3rd. I think I did go into the projects, but I just remember in my mind thinking it looked like a war-torn battle zone or something. I couldn't believe the difference in that amount of time.

MN: Right.

CS: So that's when I saw the change after '71. That it was just - -it looked like something out of third world country.

MN: And this was the whole hub area --

CS: Yes.

MN: and the projects as well --

CS: The projects yes, and that's when a lot of my close friends I knew were definitely getting out at that point.

MN: Right.

CS: I remember seeing one girl, I won't mention her name, that I used to play rope with - -she was sitting on the gutter nodding out. That's when I really saw a lot of sad things.

MN: Now women as well as men got caught up in the drugs.

CS: Yes, definitely, definitely, yes. I remember one lady that - -she was older than me and she had kids - -and I was still living in the projects, but I was in college, and I remember opening my door, going in my apartment and it was right next to the exit that led down the steps, and I open the door and she was in the doorway of the exit with a needle in her arm. And I just looked at her and I said, oh hi, and I just got on the elevator.

MN: In sort of looking back on all of this, how did you explain to yourself what had happened in New York? Here you are in Bermuda and California, you come back, and it's like you don't recognize it. How did you try to make sense of this?

CS: Well I know a lot had to do with economy. I think it's really sort of indicative of most inner-city neighborhoods. There's going to be some of us who were a little more focused, more disciplined, we have more advantages maybe in terms of our family, in terms of what they wanted us to do, and we were able to just focus on that and get out. And then there are some kids who weren't as focused and got caught up in it. New York is very easy to get caught up in just all the glamorous things. People see ways that - -they see people with nice things, and they want to try to do it the easy way to get these wonderful things, to get the glamour. I had girlfriends even from my early 20's that where it was real easy to meet a guy. You get into these guys who are these really fast, smooth guys, who were hustlers, and you get caught up in all of that. And I just told

myself, even then, I said you know what pretty faces are a dime a dozen, I have to think about what I'm going to do for the rest of my life and I just didn't allow myself to get caught up in that lifestyle, very easy to do it.

MN: Of the kids you grew up with, how many of them, a rough percentage, ended up in a situation comparable to yours? Would you say the majority?

CS: You mean grew up pre-college?

MN: Yes, yes.

CS: Pre-college, not the ones I met in college?

MN: Yes.

CS: The ones that I know of that I've kept close contact with, I'd say none. Now it's great sitting here talking to you to hear about people that I did know in the projects, to know what they're doing today. But I can say of the people that I was personally close with at that time, and I shouldn't say that - -in terms of education wise I say none, but I know people who are doing well because of other reasons, they're still doing well. But in terms of - -I was always, I can tell you right now, I was always the one even through when I was - -after college, and my friends - -I remember, no, in college, once we finished high school, I was the only one in my group that was in college. So I still couldn't do all the things that they were doing. Let's say - -

MN: Okay, so --

CS: like they'd be out partying five, six days a week. And I couldn't because I was home studying.

MN: So out of that group you were the only one to go to college?

CS: Right.

MN: Of the kids, your friends from the neighborhood.

CS: I'd say the girls. I'm just trying to think my close girlfriends. I had a couple close guy friends. Did you know Louis Randall?

UNKNOWN: I knew a Louis.

CS: No, when I say Barbara Connard, her maiden name was Barbara Randall, now that I think about it. Her brother was Louis Randall.

UNKNOWN: Right.

CS: He went to college.

UNKNOWN: Because I know a Ray Connard.

CS: That was her husband.

UNKNOWN: Okay.

CS: She married Ray Connard.

UNKNOWN: Okay.

CS: Yes, yes, yes. But her brother Louis went to college. I was very close with him, but unfortunately he's not here anymore. He died I think of AIDS a while back.

MN: Wow.

CS: He got caught up into drugs and then he died like at 39 or so. And he didn't - -and that was a shock because he was one of the quote, unquote good boys, who wanted to be a priest for a while. Then all of a sudden I find out while when we're in college that he's strung out on drugs, because he was way up in Poughkeepsie, he didn't even stay in the Bronx. But those are the only two - -like I said, my mother didn't really let me hang out with a lot of people. I knew people in the projects just from being outside and playing,

but in terms of my close girlfriends. And then, in my teens, my other close girlfriends that I'm still close with today, they didn't go to college, but they're doing well.

UNKNOWN: I'd like to add that Candy's situation, in terms of having a strict parent who said just stay home and study, that was not unusual. Quite a few people in Patterson had that same situation. And there's always going to be party people, and those are the people who are highly visible. But people who are not as visible are the ones who stayed at home, and they're quite a few.

CS: Right, and that's why I couldn't even tell you about them, because we were all at home studying. [laughter]

MN: You had a whole group of friends who all ended up - -

UNKNOWN: Absolutely.

MN: You know being - -and I guess for the girls they didn't have something at that time, like the sports, to get them athletic scholarships, which was a safety valve for some people.

CS: Yes, true.

UNKNOWN: We did have a couple of groups, like the Debs. We social group that Vicky Archibald had, that kind of come together, they're a group of really bright, young women. But there're also some of them grew up parting, and then later on you had the Feathermen and - -

CS: Yes, oh yes. And then there was the Minisink.

MN: Who were the Feathermen?

CS: That was another teen group, the guys.

UNKNOWN: Yes, yes. That was for guys. That was like a fraternal thing.

CS: Yes, yes.

MN: And did either of you ever go to Camp Minisink?

CS: No, but my friends did.

UNKNOWN: Yes my friends did too.

CS: Yes, yes.

MN: Because that was a very important organization for the people I interviewed in

Morrisania.

CS: Yes it was.

MN: You know an earlier generation in terms of - -

UNKNOWN: Between Minisink, The Feathermen, and being on the track team, which

was also another social kind of thing --

CS: Yes it was, yes - -

UNKNOWN: and going to the Penn Relays. Those were like the social groups.

MN: Now were there guys hanging around who were clearly hustlers when - -in the

'60's, who looked the part, or was it much more muted than that?

UNKNOWN: I remember some of them, I do, yes. Matter of fact I got threatened by

one of them.

MN: Really?

UNKNOWN: Yes. What happened was, it was a Saturday P.S.A. thing, and they would

open up the school for recreation and I was playing pool. So one of the guys, I was

playing against one of the hustlers, he had the baggy pants, pointed shoes - -

MN: And this was what - -in maybe early 60's?

UNKNOWN: This is the early 60's. And he said early, you beat me, I'm going to kick your ass. And so I beat him, and I waited outside for him. He never showed up.

MN: But it was like, there was a particular outfit.

UNKNOWN: Oh yes.

CS: Yes, yes.

UNKNOWN: Definitely.

MN: Did this involve baggy pants and pointed shoes, any particular - -

CS: I remember it was gators, and alpaca sweaters, you remember that? [laughter]

UNKNOWN: Yes, yes, yes.

MN: Okay. And were you aware of gangs growing up? Was that something that affected you in any - -

CS: Not the way it is now.

UNKNOWN: No.

CS: I very rarely heard of a gang. I just remembered - -did you remember, I can't remember his brother's name, but you remember Marvin when he got murdered and he went to a [unclear]. I can't think of their last name. His brother was Martin. Martin was our age [unclear], Marvin was a little younger. I remember he got killed. He went into - -a group of Puerto Ricans killed him, he was going into another project [unclear] or something.

UNKNOWN: Was it Melrose?

CS: I can't remember which project it was.

UNKNOWN: Because I remember we always had a problem with Melrose.

CS: yes, it was more about the projects versus a particular gang.

UNKNOWN: yes.

CS: You couldn't go into each other's projects, yes.

UNKNOWN: You went to either Melrose or Lincoln Projects, not so much St. Nicholas. St. Nicholas was in Harlem, and Lincoln was in Harlem. But the Melrose Projects, we definitely had a problem with, definitely.

CS: Oh, yes, yes. Yes my cousins lived there.

UNKNOWN: And Edenwald, that was Edenwald.

MN: Edenwald.

CS: Yes, yes, that's the - -

MN: Were relationships between Blacks and Puerto Ricans pretty friendly, or was there some tension?

UNKNOWN: We were tight.

CS: Yes, it depends. It was like, as he said, for the most part we were tight. I had Puerto Rican girlfriends too, but there was always a faction. Some Blacks too, you get a group that doesn't - -but they were your next door neighbors.

MN: Right, and the music was shared?

CS: Yes, salsa was very - - everybody went to Latin dances, that was more - -

MN: Okay, are there any things which you haven't had a chance to say about this sort of experience that you want to put on record? I mean looking back - -

CS: You know yes, it's so funny because you hear the media talk about the projects, and it's not very proud to tell people I came from the projects. One thing -

END OF SIDE A

MN: Talking about the media's portrayal of the projects.

CS: Yes, that it's this horribly, bad place to be, to grow up. They try to make it look like everyone there is nothing but criminals, and I tell people right away, especially working and living, and working in California I grew up in the projects. Don't - -I'm not a statistic. And it makes me the person I am today, in terms of, I think being a well-rounded person.

U: I got a question, being that you were in the school system, do you find or did you find any difference between the way we grew up in the school and the way the students that you had were growing up in the school, relationship with the parents and teacher wise?

CS: Well okay, I don't teach anymore so it's been like 15 or 17 years since I taught school. But I'm trying to think, again, a lot of it depends on I shouldn't say this, well I'm not going to say - -it does to a certain extent boil down to socio-economics, in terms of which school district you're in, the school you're in. You're always going to find, even like a school in the inner-city you have the parents who are just trying to do the best they can, trying to make sure their children are focused. I remember my first teaching job in the New York City School System, a 15 year old - -no it was like sixth grade, but a boy telling me - - he would come sit on my desk [unclear]. I had a class with a lot of discipline problems it was a special class that they made just for with all the discipline problems that couldn't go into the regular classroom. [laughs]

MN: Right.

CS: And they give you these classes when you're 23, 24 years old like you really know what to do, and I remember him saying something to me, and he says you know I may not be alive when I'm 15, and that just always stuck with me when he said that. Here he was eleven, he's thinking he's not going to be alive when he's 15. But then I can think

about teaching in California in the suburbs, and I had a lot of gifted kids, and I had the kids who weren't. And I remember sometimes, like one parent coming in for a parent-teacher conference and she's telling me all her problems, and I'm the social worker and I have to listen to all her problems. We're trying to focus in on her child and what she needs to do in terms of getting her grades up. But it's all, and again like you said, it's all interrelated because the parents problem becomes the child's problem in terms of how well that child's going to do in school, in terms of how focused that child is, how stable the home life is, so it is interrelated.

MN: In terms of the economics, do you remember at Patterson, most of the father's going to work –

CS: Definitely.

MN: And did that change at a certain point, like by the early '70's, were there less - - were there more female headed households or it was still a place of dominant paired families?

CS: My friends had two parent households. I can't speak for obviously everyone, but I can speak for the kids that I knew, and the kids had two parent households. And I think obviously then there were more two-parent households then than you find now.

U: Yes, I think you're right.

CS: Yes.

MN: Anything else that leaks into your mind? You feel proud to have come from the Bronx?

CS: Oh definitely. I know I'm always - -I wave that in the air in California all the time.

MN: If you were going to tell somebody from California what was great about growing up in the Bronx, what would you say?

CS: The people. They're more realistic, they're more down to earth. California is a lot of - -will this be on tape, like they say, you have a lot of airheads in California. You know superficial people. [laughter] You have to really, you have to really hunt to find your niche there. [laughter] And I've been there for almost thirty years.

MN: Right.

CS: But you really have to find your niche there. It's still, New Yorkers are just the best. The people here are just down to earth. It's a whole different - -It's a much stronger sense of yourself, and who you are, and how focused you are. It's sort of like that song goes, if you can make it here you can make it anywhere, New York, New York. I think we can stand up to pressure better, just adversity. We're stronger people I think.

UNKNOWN: Are you here or there now?

CS: I live in California, I'm just here visiting.

UNKNOWN: Where at?

CS: I live in, Well Los Angeles, Redondo Beach.

MN: Your son lives where?

U: He's in **Los Filos*** area.

CS: Okay, yes. It's pretty there, if you want to see a different part of LA, because it's a little more quaint there, yes.

U: Yes.

CS: Have you been?

U: Yes, oh yes. He's got a house there, and he's doing well.

CS: What does he say about LA?

U: Oh, he hates it.

CS: It's funny because when I moved there it took me 40 years to finally say to myself I'm going to stay here, because you keep comparing it to New York. But I don't know too many people from New York who stay in California. Most New Yorkers don't give it a chance. They leave after a year or two. They say, oh I can't deal with this and they go. Most of my friends are from different states other than California, other than New York friends. It's a totally different animal. [laughs]

UNKNOWN: Yes, I don't like it either.

MN: Okay, anything?

CS: No, I can't think of anything else right now.

MN: Okay, well thank you very much. This was very, very helpful.

END OF INTERVIEW