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## Pruitt, Henry

Bronx African American History Project  
*Fordham University*

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Transcriber: Connor Murphy

Mark Naison (MN): 23<sup>rd</sup> interview of the Bronx African-American History Project. It's August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005 at Fordham University and we're here with Dr. Henry Pruitt, who grew up in the Morrisania section of the Bronx and has been an educator, professor, and a writer. Joining us is Rachel Donaldson, former student archivist, who is now a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University. And this interview is going to focus on the natural environment of the Bronx and how Mr. Pruitt experienced it. When you were growing up in Morrisania, what were the rivers and parks and beaches that you frequented, and how did you encounter them? What's your first memory of going to the park or the beach?

Dr. Henry Pruitt (HP): My first memory is in Crotona Park, which has had a pond and has still got a pond, and that pond was interesting because it was stocked with sunfish and catfish and crawfish. And I remember - -

MN: And this is in the 40s and 50s?

HP: Yes. I remember one day we, my buddy and I, Albert Abdul, did very well in catching crawfish, and we had maybe forty or fifty of them. And we brought them home to put in the fish tank and kind of observe them, and Mrs. Abdul saw the bucket of crawfish and put them in the pot. So we ended up eating - - I'll see you Jamie - - we ended up having crawfish that afternoon for a snack.

MN: Was this when you were in elementary school?

HP: This was when I was in elementary school.

MN: And what elementary school were you attending at the time?

HP: Went to - - in the six years of elementary school I went to P.S. 54, P.S. 63, and P.S.

99 because the district kept changing, and 99 was the new school at the time.

MN: Now what block did your friend - - it was Anthony Abdul?

DC: No, his name was Albert Abdul, lived on Prospect Avenue near 168<sup>th</sup> Street and I lived on 168<sup>th</sup> Street between Prospect and Union.

MN: Did your father teach you to fish? Was this something - -

HP: No, my father didn't care very much for fishing, but I went to Camp Minisink, and at Camp Minisink I had a fishing counselor named Pop Nevilles. And Pop Nevilles taught me how to fish in Camp Minisink, and in Camp Minisink was a catfish pond. And I was one of his most outstanding students, so in the fall, Pop Nevilles took me fishing in the New York area after camp was over.

MN: How old were you when you first went to Camp Minisink?

DC: I was - - it was 1943. Now you subtract 1943 from 2005 and I'm seventy-one years old, so whatever age that was, that's what I was in 1943. The math is too much for me. Something like nine years old.

MN: So he was the first person who put a rod and reel in your hand?

HP: Oh yes. He was the official fishing counselor.

MN: When somebody teaches you to fish, what are the things they tell you? Like what are some of the things he told - - the wisdom of fishing as you were exposed to it?

HP: Well you have to be patient for one thing. You have to have the correct bait, and you have to be in the right place at the right time, because you can be in the same place at different times, and one time catch no fish and another time catch a lot of fish. And then you have to prepare for different kinds of fish that eat different kinds of bait.

MN: Now, did he teach you that part of fishing was cleaning the fish?

HP: Yes. We used to have fish fries at Minisink. We would catch a bunch of catfish and clean them up and have them for dinner. He had a fishing program, so it was a fishing club. So in a two week period we may have fish fries once or twice.

MN: How many people were in that club?

HP: Well it was at the camp. In other words, the camp had maybe three hundred kids and you would have art and music and drama, then you would have fishing as a class.

MN: Did any of your other siblings get involved in fishing through Minisink?

HP: No, they didn't get involved in fishing from anywhere.

MN: Of the 5 Pruitt children you were the fisherman?

HP: I was the fisherman and my father only took me fishing about two or three times because he didn't like it that much.

MN: So this was all Pop Neville.

HP: Pop Nevilles was the man.

MN: And where did Pop Neville live?

HP: He lived on Undercliff Avenue in the Bronx.

MN: He also lived in the Bronx!

HP: Oh yes.

MN: Now Undercliff is between where and where?

HP: It's along the Harlem River somewhere. It's not - - I don't know exactly what the street numbers are but it's in the west Bronx.

MN: I think I know where it is; I guess you call it Highbridge. Maybe down - -

HP: Probably.

MN: And when he took you fishing in New York City, where would he take you?

HP: Well he used to take me to the Hudson River and we would fish off the piers in the Hudson River and catch something called tommy cod.

MN: From the Bronx side or the Manhattan side?

HP: We went to Manhattan.

MN: And you would be fishing in the - -

HP: - - Hudson River.

MN: - - in the Hudson.

HP: In the winter we would catch tommy cods. And you catch them on sandworms. And tommy cods were about, lets say less than twelve inches long, absolutely delicious, and they would come in the winter.

MN: Now what is a sandworm?

HP: Sandworm is an annelid; it lives in the sand in the Atlantic Ocean.

MN: And where would you get the sandworms?

HP: You can dig them at low tide along Orchard Beach and places like that.

MN: So you get them at Orchard Beach?

HP: You'd buy them at the store, but you could dig around in the area.

MN: How did you discover that there was good fishing in the Bronx River?

HP: The Bronx River - - I'm not really sure how I started fishing in the Bronx River, but the Bronx River in my history is four different places. The first place was West Farms, and West Farms is a last falls that goes into the river and goes out into the upper New York Bay. And crabs would come into the last falls, carp would come into last falls, and

we could sit in West Farms and catch carp and catch crabs. I'm not sure we weren't supposed to eat them.

MN: Right now - -

HP: - - Let me finish this now. Also at West Farms, you would see the eels come into the river in the spring time. Now the eels were like two or three inches long, shaped like regular eels and they would go up the river. Now if you go north of West Farms, inside of Bronx Park, there's a very tall falls, and at the base of that falls you would catch carp and you'd catch white perch. And you would see the eels coming along up to the wall of the falls, climbing up the wall of the falls to go into the upper river. You can actually see them.

MN: Who were your fishing buddies? Were they mostly Minisink kids?

HP: No, mostly I fished by myself.

MN: You fished by - -

HP: I always fished by myself. I'd get on the bus get to the - -

MN: So you'd take the bus from Prospect Avenue - - and this is West Farms and where?

HP: And Westchester Avenue or whatever.

MN: Oh, right near the L?

HP: Right where the L is where 180<sup>th</sup> Street where the Bronx Park - -

MN: Just where Bronx Park starts.

HP: Right.

MN: And you would - - and it was easy access to the river?

HP: Yes. And you could fish on - - at that point, at that point at the West Farms and a little farther north, you could fish on that side of Bronx Park because there were no

animal exhibits at that time over there and you could just climb down it and fish up to the main falls. They discouraged you from fishing in the main park, in the main Bronx Zoo Park, but at Fordham Road, the Bronx River went underneath the highway. And you could climb down under the - - climb down the highway and there was a place where you could get access to the river and fish for carp, right at Fordham Road at the entrance to Bronx Park. Now then you catch carp. Then you go further north to the Bronx River Parkway where it becomes that very curvaceous road up in the Yonkers area. And the fish of merit there was goldfish, not carp. You look in the water and you see hundreds of goldfish, and we would catch the goldfish and put them in the pond. You know, take them home, put them in the tank. And goldfish come in all flavors. There were black ones, brown ones, gold ones, spotted ones, white ones, and we would get a big kick out of catching goldfish so we fished there.

RD: You mentioned earlier that you were in Boy Scouts.

HP: Yes.

RD: Did they do anything to encourage outdoor activity or encourage fishing?

HP: Yes. We went to places like Alpine, it was a boy scout camp. There would be all kinds of trips to different places, and I always carried my fishing rod, so whenever there was a chance to go fishing, if anybody wanted to go, fine, they didn't want to go, I went anyway.

RD: Did they do anything to introduce you to different places or spots in the Bronx or in the city?

HP: No, they didn't do much in the fishing department. They - - it depends on your leader. The leader we had wasn't a fisherman.

MN: How did you discover this information about the different spots in the Bronx

River? Were there older fisherman who told you the ropes?

HP: No. I just kind of learned that along the way. Also, in that area, north of the Bronx Line in Westchester there's another river called the Saw Mill River. And the Saw Mill River is loaded with carp. So you could fish for carp. I don't eat carp. I have eaten carp, but you only need to do that once. That's if you don't know how to fix them, because it tastes like mud. But, catching carp is really thrilling because they're very strong. I've lost two or three rods trying to - -

MN: Really, they're that strong?

HP: Yes. I mean, carp get to be ten or fifteen or twenty pounds. So if you put your line down on the ground and talk to your neighbor, you may see your line going across the lake because they'll snatch it and take it out.

MN: So this is a whole life you had doing this. And - -

HP: - - Still do it.

MN: - - and still do it, and started when you were nine years old.

HP: Yes, about that.

MN: And when - - how old were you when you started going to all the spots on the Bronx River?

HP: As I grew up, I grew up in the Bronx, I would find different spots on the Bronx River. Now, the Bronx River was one site; that was for fresh water fish. Then we would fish on Orchard Beach. And for Orchard Beach you catch flounders and you catch striped bass.

MN: Now was this casting from the jetties - -

HP: - - from the shore, right - -

MN: - - from the shore - - [Crosstalk]

HP: - - jetties. And there's a place called the lagoon on the back end of Orchard Beach near a parking lot. And you can catch flounders in the lagoon in the winter time. And so we would fish there. And then, when I was young I would climb out on the jetties in Orchard Beach and fish, but I cut that out recently. [Laughs]

RD: Just wondering, when you mentioned that you just went by yourself. But in the kind of obscure places or places that we wouldn't think of to be common for fishing, especially like Fordham Road, would you see many other people there?

HP: There usually were people fishing, yes.

RD: So it was - - even though it was - - you were the anomaly in your family and maybe your friends, but there was - -

HP: There were other people fishing there, yes.

MN: Was there camaraderie between fishing people or competition?

HP: Well, camaraderie came later. Like, I have a place now called the Englewood Boat Basin on the Hudson River, and there are people who fish there every day. So, you come down there and you see the same guys you saw the day before. I wouldn't go down there but maybe once a week or so. But there are people who camp there, put there pop tents up, it seems to be. But they are there every single day, that's what they do. They fish year round, except when it's unbelievably cold. And the fishing in the Hudson River is, at times, very, very good for striped bass.

MN: When you were growing up, pollution was not considered an issue? It wasn't - - was it something people talked about or was it assumed that anything you caught was ok?

HP: If I were to walk down Prospect Avenue without any clothes on I would probably light up because pollution was not something I worried about. We catch them and we eat them. We still catch them and eat them. Pollution is - - if - - I don't want to get preachy, but I do a lot of fishing now in the reservoirs around New York City. And as you launch your boat there's a big sign on the reservoir: do not eat one meal of fish from this pond in a week or a month or whatever. So I can't be worried about that at seventy-one, I don't care. [Laughter]

MN: So, where was the Boy Scout troop located?

HP: It was in Saint Augustine Church. Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts.

MN: Boy Scouts out of Saint Augustine's. How long were you involved in this? Did you become an eagle scout? Did you go up - -

HP: I think I went to star or life; I didn't get to eagle scout. We started out as a Cub Scout at eight or nine years old, and I must have stayed in the movement till I was fifteen or sixteen. And we had some very big time Scout masters like Clarence Cave, who became a minister later on, was one of my Scout masters. Douglas - - I mean, Bowen - - lets see, what was his name - - Walter Bowen was another leader we had. Edler Hawkins was the minister at the time. And we had a lot of youth activities around that church. We were on the - - we had a competitive basketball team. One of the teams - - there were two - - one was called the Knights, and we would play other teams. And I'm not really sure, looking at it now, how we did that because the ceiling is about ten foot high. [Laughter]

MN: Did you play sports also along with the fishing?

HP: Mostly I was a fisherman. I didn't get wrapped up in basketball or baseball or any of the other things. I just fished because in fishing there's a variety of things you can do, and

it's kind of contemplative. I don't mind sitting for an hour waiting for something to bite. I like being in places that are very, very attractive botanically. And I got lots of patience and I get a kick out of catching stuff.

MN: Did your immersion in fishing coincide with an interest in science? Was - - in school, was that your - -

HP: No, the science and the fishing kind of went along together, but I was - - Minisink, every summer we'd go to camp. I became a nature counselor at Camp Minisink. So I taught other people about nature in general, the plants the trees, the trails, the spotted turtles that are an endangered species at Camp Minisink. The snapping turtles, the green snakes, water snakes, and fishing somehow got in there when I had a free moment.

MN: So you became the nature - - wow. What was the natural life in Crotona Park when you were growing up? You mentioned that the lake was stocked. What else was there?

HP: Crotona Park Lake is a mystery to me. There is no apparent inlet or outlet. I don't know where the water comes from. I don't know where it goes. All I know is that when I first started fishing there, we used to use a bent pin with a thread, a bent straight pin, and we would use either worms or pieces of dough and we would catch sonnies. And that went on for a long time, I mean a period of years. And then, after awhile, we discovered that there were catfish in there that were bigger than the sonnies, so they were more better for the table. And then, all along, there were these crawfish, and the crawfish taste pretty good in the pot, you know?

MN: Yes, yes.

HP: And I don't know about the - - we don't know about pollution. We didn't talk pollution. We just said this is where you catch whatever, and you catch it.

MN: Did you get into canoeing or boating or - - as part of this?

HP: Well, rowboating at Minisink. I never - - I've been in canoes. Canoes are too unsteady for me. I think that if you want to be in a canoe you should just canoe, but you don't use that to fish because sometimes you hook into something that's really substantial and if you're not paying attention you get dunked. I don't like being in the water.

MN: [Laughs] Your being a nature counselor, is that one of the things that encouraged you to consider a career in teaching and working with children?

HP: It became something that encouraged me to be a science teacher.

MN: So you were - -

HP: I didn't start out that way. When I came out of college - -

MN: Where did you go to college?

HP: I went to Hunter College. All my life I had been interested in science so that was kind of - -

MN: Where did you go to high school?

HP: I went to Dewitt Clinton High School. Is that in the Bronx? [Laughs]

MN: Why did you go to Clinton and Jim go to Morris?

HP: Well, there's four years between us, and a lot of wisdom. I went to the better place of course. [Laughter] So we went to Hunter College, and I studied science. And I ended up working at Sloan-Kettering Institute for Cancer Research as a lab technician. My sister Bessie was working at Alexander Berger Junior High School as a gym teacher. At the time, we were making \$2,800 a year. We had to work every day at Sloan-Kettering. We got time off, but we had to follow the experiments, so that when the experiment was due you had to be there. So what they would do is they would give you the time in days, so I

substitute taught at Berger. Then my sister Bess lobbied for me to get to be a teacher there, and so it kind of became a natural - -

MN: And your first full-time teaching position was a science teacher?

HP: Yes. And it was interesting because I came in in January on a full-time contract and I had class 9-9. Now in those days they graded kids based on their academic achievement from 9-1 to 9-16. So I had 9-9, and I learned more from those kids in 9-9 than I've learned before or since.

MN: What was that experience like? Where was the junior high school located?

HP: 143<sup>rd</sup> Street and Brook Avenue in the Bronx.

MN: I know where - -

HP: If we're talking about the Bronx we got to - - [Crosstalk]

MN: - - not too far from Saint Mary's Park. And that's a tough area.

HP: It was Puerto Rican at the time.

MN: You say you learned from the kids. What do you mean by that?

HP: The first thing you have to learn as a teacher is how to manage the kids. I had a middle group in terms of achievement, and they were also middle in terms of behavior. So we had to figure out how we were going to run this thing. It took a little bit of - -

MN: How did these kids differ from the kids you were working with at Camp Minisink for example?

HP: When I was at Minisink, I was a kid, and now I'm a grown up. So it didn't - - there was no relationship at all. The kids at Camp Minisink wanted to be there and the kids in my class didn't have any choice.

MN: So they were captive.

HP: So we had a different kind of relationship. It was - - they were good to me, that class 9-9. I really appreciated that because they knew I was new, and I knew that I didn't know how to manage them, so we helped each other.

MN: How did you get through to them and build a bond? I mean, I have many students now going into teaching, and class management is always a big issue, and also getting the trust of young people. So, how did you do it?

HP: Being a camp counselor for a couple of years before that, I had a way of working with kids that just seemed to work for me. I thought that I was fair, they thought I was fair, and we kind of collaborated on a lot of stuff. I work with them to accomplish the task of learning and teaching as if they had something to contribute to that process. And, it wasn't that I'm the teacher sitting up here and there are the kids down there. I said, look, this is what we have to learn. Let's figure how we're going to go about doing it. And it was - - it worked out good for me.

MN: When you're teaching a science class, was it very hands-on?

HP: Yes, it was a gee-wiz kind of thing. I would usually figure out some kind of a thing I would do that the kids would say how did you do that. One of the things was to take a ball and have a fountain, you know, a water fountain, and just sit it up on top of the fountain. And the kids liked to look at the ball and its not falling off, its just sitting right at the top spinning around. I said hey I can do that [MN Laughs]. And we would do little things like putting hydrochloric acid in a bottle with metal filings and it would create hydrogen gas and we would light the gas coming out the tube, and they'd say, you know, that's interesting. And one time - - I have a little person that sits on my right shoulder who looks out for me. One time we were going to do that hydrogen experiment, and you

know how the kids gather around the science table. I said everybody move back [Laughs]. I lit whatever it was and everything exploded, but they were far enough back so that they didn't get hurt, and this person on my shoulder looked out for me. We didn't do that experiment any more [Laughter]. Then the other thing - - we used to - - learning from kids - - we had a couple of times where we dissected things. I remember the last rabbit that I dissected for the class was an emotional experience for me and for them because the rabbit was alive. We used ether to put the rabbit to sleep, and in the process of doing that the rabbit convulsed and it turned everybody off. It was the kind of thing you never forget so I haven't killed any more animals that way [Laughs]. I see you're emoting about that. It was pretty gruesome. I just haven't done that anymore. I have to go to the place where they pickle them and we get them dead and we can work with them. [Laughs]

MN: So your first teaching experience was a very positive one?

HP: Yes, I loved it.

MN: Wow.

HP: It was very tense and very trying and very hard, but I got along with the kids.

MN: Did you get to know them as individuals and learn something about their lives?

HP: As a kid - - now this was 19, lets see '61 - - sometime about 1962 or something like that. I still remember a kind name Thomas Manigault who was in that class, who was one of the kids who just - - he liked me, we got along real well, and we managed the class together. It was wonderful. I don't know if - - I don't remember too many things that far ago, but I remember him, Thomas Manigault. One of those good kids who had to be there, but he - - his judgment of what I was trying to do was ok, and the other kids kind of went along with the program so we had a good time. I was cool at the end of the year.

After I made it through that first six months I could do almost anything in the next semester. Let me tell you another story that's really about teaching at 139. They made up a schedule the following year where I had two classes at the same time for one period. It was like a, supposed to be a lecture period. They were in a small auditorium in the school. My room was on the fourth floor and this was on the first floor and I had to go from whatever class was before that to get down there to be there for the auditorium period. And one day I was late. I think I was fifteen minutes late; class is only forty minutes. My feeling coming from the fourth floor down to this class was when I got there this place would be in disarray. When I opened the door the kids got to their feet and clapped. I'll never forget that. These sixty kids or whatever it was were so happy that I had showed up. I said goodness gracious I can do anything. [Laughs]

RD: How many years did you teach in the Bronx?

HP: About seven years.

MN: And how long in that school?

HP: All seven.

MN: All seven. And then what was your next career move? It was 7 years teaching science and - -

HP: I started out with five years at Sloan-Kettering, seven years at 139, and then I went to Borough of Manhattan Community College. No, no, I must have gone to Harlem Prep for a year. At Harlem Prep I'm minding my business one day and here comes a person from Minisink. She said I'm at Columbia and we have a program over there which will help people get their doctorate, and the department chairman is looking for somebody to

work with him, and you should come this afternoon and go see him. So she took me over to Frizziani, who was the chairman of the department - -

MN: - - That's in the School of Ed.

HP: Teachers College, Columbia University. And he said I've heard some things about you and I'm prepared to offer you a job at Teachers College where you will take your Ed.D. and I'm prepared with a two year contract. The two year contract, he said this will take care of all your expenses in terms of the school and what do you need to provide for your family, because I had a couple of kids and a wife.

MN: And where were you living at this time?

HP: Probably in the Bronx.

MN: In what neighborhood?

HP: In 168<sup>th</sup> Street.

MN: You were still living - -

HP: Not at that house, I was living in the house next door, an apartment.

MN: So all the time you were working in the Bronx you were still living on 168<sup>th</sup> between Union and Prospect?

HP: Until 1963. So I may have been in Teaneck at that time. I'm - - the years get kind of mixed up. But he said what do you need to live. I said I need ten thousand dollars a year. He said you get a thousand dollars a month tax free to work with me for two years.

MN: What was this, the late 60s?

HP: This was 1970.

MN: 1970. That was the year I started at Fordham.

HP: Ok. What happened after that was the two years were up, and of course knowing some about doctoral degrees, I hadn't finished [MN Laughs]. But I had finished the course work, and I was working on the dissertation so I went to - - I had to leave Teachers College. I went to Borough of Manhattan Community College, and I was chairman of the Department of Developmental Skills, which meant we managed the ESL and the remedial reading department.

MN: So, did you have any experience in those areas?

HP: What reading and ESL? No. But I had some experience as an administrator because part of the time I was at Berger, the principal made me acting assistant principle for about a year, which was handy. So, the beginning of the second year at Borough of Manhattan Community College, President Draper called me into his office and said you didn't finish your degree. I said I don't need a degree to work here, this is a community college. He said, look, here's the deal, this is eleven o'clock in the morning, at three o'clock this afternoon you will sign an agreement that you will finish your degree by June, June 30, or you will be fired as of the end of the semester. This was like April. So I told him I don't have to put up with this, and he said well ok, do whatever you want. So at a quarter to three, his secretary calls me up and says hey, I got these two letters. One is a conditional reappointment based on whether or not you finish the degree, and the other one is a termination. You come down here and sign whichever one you like. I ended up with [Unintelligible]. So, this was April 15<sup>th</sup> or so. I get on the phone with my advisor at Teachers College. I say hey I got a problem [Laughter]. They said if I don't finish then I'm out of a job. So a guy named Jim Kelly, who worked at the Ford Foundation who was also a part-time professor at Teachers College. He said every Monday at four o'clock you

come down here and we going to get you through this degree. So every Monday we sat down and we went through what we had to go through. Now here's the other part. I got a scholarship from New Jersey School Board's business administrators group. And they asked me what I was going to do with the paper because it was about how school districts invest in money, invest their idle funds. And I told them I was going to publish it. So they let that go for awhile, and then I get this letter from them saying if you going to publish the data we give you then we're not going to cooperate, we're not going to answer your questions. So I get back to them and say ok, forget about that, I'm not going to accept your money, and I'm not going to publish the information. I'll just talk to people on a one-to-one basis. So I dropped out of that money thing, but I managed to finish the data. So in June, I had a kind of a final draft of my dissertation and I told President Draper and then I went to California. Got my little Minas Motor - - Minas Motor - - Minas Mini Motor Minivan that could sleep six people and we drove to California. Nine thousand miles in six weeks. And I came back in September and finished up the details of the paper. Interesting piece about that, and this is for you. I turned it in all finished. By the time I got home, there was a phone call from the graduate studies office. The format is not the format that we want. You have to do it over. This is special for you. So I said ok, what should I do? They said we have this list of people who will retype it for you. So you got to get in touch with one of them. So I contacted whoever it was and I haven't heard from them since, but I got the degree. I didn't hear anymore from them but I used their people and they said ok. So it was interesting. I don't know where that is in terms of fishing, but this - -

MN: - - No, but this was terrific. Ok, So - -

[Break in Recording]

MN: Henry, it struck me that you had a great many mentors growing up, including male mentors, which is something many young people today don't have. Could you talk a little bit about that?

HP: Ok, in growing up, I guess the first mentor I had was Pop Nevilles, fishing counselor. We didn't think of him as a mentor, we just thought of him as a fishing counselor. And as I grew older there was another guy called - - his name is Cobham, Cobham. I've forgotten his first name but he was the guy who went to Lincoln and got James into Lincoln University. He was one of the directors of Camp Minisink. Decosta Cobham, that was his name.

MN: Decosta Cobham.

HP: Yes. And then the other guy was Frizziani, who really helped me a lot in terms of him being the chairman of the department. But the one who saved me was Jim Kelly, who was the one who said ok sit down lets figure this thing out. But there are lots of people who helped along the way. One guy who I don't remember but had a big impact on me was when I finished my masters at NYU. The first masters, that was the masters in science education. My advisor looked me in the eye and he said you have enough education now. And I didn't like that particularly so I said ok. Then I went on to Teachers College and got a masters in education, a six-year certificate in education administration, and an Ed.D. I got five college degrees. So he was a mentor but didn't know it. He was an influence.

MN: Growing up on Prospect Avenue, we're talking about people in organizations. Were there people who played that role in the neighborhood; told kids when they were out of line or helped them with things?

HP: Well there was a group called the Six and Sevens, the six and seven years old. And I've forgotten the name of the woman, I think it was Eloise Owens, who ran the group called the Six and Sevens, and I was five years old and they let me be in that club. So even early in the stage there was a neighborhood organization that looked after little kids. My mother was a club person. She was the cooperative fund chairperson for Camp Minisink for like twenty five years. And my father was one of the commissioners of Boy Scouts in New York City for a very long time. And of course both of these people were attached to Greatest Congregational Church. But my mother had a bridge club that met regularly and she had a club called the EX9. I don't know what EX9 stands for but it was a neighborhood club. One of the people in the EX9 was named Prescovia McConnie. And Prescovia McConnie - - we knew when she was there because when the club met we had to go upstairs and go to bed right, because they hung out all night. But she had one of these rolling belly laughs, and when she would laugh, oh man the room would light up, the house would light up, everything would light up. But we knew she was there because she could laugh like that. Then there were - -

MN: So civic involvement was central to your household?

HP: Yes. And they had teas, like they had a neighborhood block association which is very interesting because there was a Union and Prospect block association my parents started, and now I've been the chairman of the so-called fore-history association in my neighborhood and now I'm the chairman of the regional block association in Teaneck.

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There's twelve block associations and we have leadership meetings and I'm the one that kind of runs that. And that has a lot to do with what my parents thought was something that you should do. Now, you never give them credit for that, but it kind of seeps in between the cracks.

MN: Ok, good.

[End of Interview]