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Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

Transcriber: Patricia Wright

Dr. Mark Naison (MN): Hello this is the 41st interview of the Bronx African American History Project. Today we are interviewing, Jacque Smith Bonneau another one of the many people we are interviewing from Lyman Place in Morrisania. And we have with us Robert **Gumbs** who is one of our regular interviewers and Robin Kelly Professor at Columbia who is writing a book about Thelonius Monk, who features in this story because he is Jacque's uncle and lived on Lyman Place for a while. So, we'll start off with the questions we ask everybody. When did your family first move to the Bronx?

Jacqueline Smith Bonneau (JSB): Well I don't know the exact year, but I would say around 1945, 1943,4,5, something like that.

MN: Right, so did they move here directly from -- from Harlem or from another part of the city?

JSB: Right, they lived in Harlem, and many places in Harlem. However, they moved to Home Street which is -- the Prospect Avenue in the Bronx [crosstalk].

MN: Now, this is Home between where and where [inaudible]?

JSB: I don't know what street was above us, but I do know it was Home Street and we had -- its Prospect Avenue and Home Street.

MN: Right.

JSB: I don't know don't know what the block is.

MN: Now, How did your family find out about the Bronx? Do you know how they ended up getting that first apartment?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Well probably my mother could answer that more specifically. I was a little girl then, under five years old, but I knew this was a better place to live. This is an improvement. But who gave her that information to Home Street, I don't really know?

MN: Do you have other relatives who live in the Morrisania neighborhood, who lived there?

JSB: Not other relatives. I think that we were the first to be there. And our family was there and so did my aunt and my two aunts which were my fathers sisters, which one of them, Nelly, is the wife of Thelonius Monk.

MN: Now, is your family of Southern or Caribbean origin?

JSB: Oh, They're Southerners, yes.

MN: And from what states originally?

JSB: Well my father's born in St. Augustine, Florida. My mother however was born in New York, she's a New Yorker. Her family -- she's born at **Sloane** Hospital 1920, June, excuse me, January 2nd, 1920.

MN: Did your fam -- your fathers family still have strong ties to Florida? Did you go back South?

JSB: We had a lot of his family. His father was still alive. He had aunts and first cousins. His mother died here in New York. But, yes quite a bit of family in St. Augustine and Jacksonville.

MN: And did you go down there periodically when you were a child?

JSB: I wish I had. I didn't go till I was about 17, 18 years old.

MN: what sort of work did your father do?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: My father worked for a number of years for the Pullman, as a Pullman Porter.

MN: He was a Pullman Porter!

JSB: Yes.

MN: Okay.

JSB: Yeah.

MN: Because this -- one of the things that the Pruitts said is to move into the area around Prospect Avenue in the 40s, the landlords were often looking for postal workers and Pullman Porters.

[Crosstalk]

JSB: Well I guess he fits [chuckles].

MN: Okay, so when you moved to the Bronx, he was still a Pullman Porter?

JSB: Yes.

MN: Okay.

JSB: Yes.

MN: Did he have any friends who were Pullman Porters who worked, who lived in the neighborhood?

JSB: Not in the neighborhood. He might have had them other than --

MN: Right.

JSB: --who I know about but not in the neighborhood.

MN: Did your mother work?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: My mother did domestic work at that time. But I don't know really for sure whether she was working when she had us. She may -- maybe do some day's work here and there or something like that. I don't really know --

MN: Do you know if she did the day work in the Bronx or in Manhattan.

JSB: She spoke of Brighton Beach. So, that would put it to --

MN: That's a long, long ride.

JSB: Yes.

MN: Now, how long did your family stay at Home Street?

JSB: More information from my mother, but I would imagine ore than five years, I would imagine, because --

MN: Now, were you going to elementary school when you were living at Home Street?

JSB: No.

MN: Okay.

JSB: No, that came a little later.

MN: So you went to school from Lyman place.

JSB: Yes

MN: Now, do you know --

JSB: Kindergarten.

MN: Okay, now do you know how the family found the apartment on Lyman Place?

JSB: I don't know who informed her, but this was yet another move, a bigger place, a nicer place and she jumped all over it, you know when they say, yep this is the next thing to do. But I understand that while they were at Home street they made very, very good

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

friends. And one of those friendships was a mother -- was a black business that she would, I don't know if she went there often, but it was a laundry shop. There was the Graham family. And, this is --

MN: And they're from Home Street --

JSB: Yes. And they lived -- they had a -- they owned a -- no they were from the Caribbean and they owned their house and they had a business, a laundry mat --

MN: A laundromat

JSB: A laundromat. I don't know if they had machines at that time but they -

MN: You brought in clothes and then they would give them back to you ironed and all that --

JSB: All of that kind of thing, yeah.

MN: Um, do you have any recollections of Home Street, what that was like as a child?

JSB: I know that the building was mixed -- that we had white families still in there. That was always a plus. We had some white families in there. That meant that the landlord would keep the heat going and keep things repaired and all that kind of stuff.

MN: So that was a multi-racial Block, Home Street?

JSB: Yes, pretty much. At least from that building from what I know now. All around, I was too little to know.

MN: When you moved to Lyman place, was that a multiracial block?

JSB: I think in the beginning there was still some, some, some, some - white families in the block. I don't remember them distinctly but, there I think so and for sure there were

white shop owners. Because, we really got to know them, the vegetable store, the grocery store, the shoemaker and so on.

MN: Right. Now, those were on, those were on Prospect Avenue or also on the side streets?

JSB: They were on -- for instance, we had a store Rudy's. I don't know if you remember Rudy's. And what was that on --

Robert Gumbs (RG): The Rudy's was -- the Rudy's might have been on 169th street.

JSB: We could just leave our house and go down the street, yes.

RG: Right, but there was a grocery store on the corner of Lyman place and **Stebben's** Avenue. You might be referring to that. Rudy's, I forgot his --

JSB: Oh, Rudy's was the very, very strong, German fellow and he would make potato salad. That's how I remember, all the food. And he'd close exactly at one o' clock and all that kind of thing. And he had nice clean cold cut --

MN: Very well kept.

JSB: Well kept, his wife worked there, we had Rudy's. And then we had Frank the Vegetable man and he sold great vegetables, real fresh [crosstalk]

MN: Now that was a store or a -- was it a horse driven cart? Was this a store?

[inaudible statement by Gumbs]

JSB: This was a store. Yes, yes.

MN: Okay, and he was, where was the vegetable store.

JSB: This was --

RG: I remember one of those places on 169th street [inaudible], yes --

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: On 169th street, yes. And then on, oh I don't know what Avenue, it was **Fred Vogel** saying the butcher. That was -- I just don't remember the street. Ill have to fill you in later on that.

MN: And he was the Butcher?

JSB: He was **the** Butcher. See there was **the** vegetable store man and **the** grocer. And these were all white stores that stayed long --

MN: So you had -- but it was very conveniently located to the block?

JSB: My mother would feel so safe to -- they'd give you your change all wrapped up in a piece of paper, and "give this to your mother" and so we --

MN: So what are-- you moved from Home Street to Lyman place. What are your first recollections of the new block? What did --

JSB: It was clean. It was not that the other place wasn't clean, but it was spotless and the apartments were nice and we could -- and airish and since we lived on the fifth floor we had access to be on the roof and --

MN: So describe your apartment. How many -- at this point how many children were living --

JSB: Lets see, there's Jacque, there's Muffin, might have been three or four of us. Something like that, three or four. And we had great neighbors who did wonderful things. The Graham family they were right next to -- we were in 5A, they were in 5B and -- the Graham family are the same people I was talking about from Home Street. The uncles of this family, of the -- of this family, meaning the brother of the woman who had

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

that -- rented that apartment were the Graham brothers that did a lot of work for
Thelonius in years to come. And so we made -- they were contractors.

MN: They were a musical family as well?

_____Begin transcription on Videotape_____

JSB: No they were contractors --

MN: Contractors

JSB: Yes.

MN: Oh, okay.

JSB: So that's the kind of work they did. And so they fixed things and they were very
creative.

MN: They were also West Indian?

JSB: The same family, yes.

MN: Now, was this the kind of block where you come on the block and all the kids come
out. And like - how do they greet you as the new kid on the block.

JSB: Well --

MN: Did they smack you in the face or --

JSB: No, no, no, no, no. We met the Harris's -- they were just- and they had two children
Paula and Stanley and they were nice kids. They were what my mother called nice
children. So we met a lot of nice kids. That means they had activities, they did things,
they went places, they went to church, they got good grades in school, all that kind of
stuff.

MN: How -- what Elementary school did you attend?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: I attended Public School 54, that's in Intervale avenue.

MN: And how far was that from Lyman place?

JSB: Well that's a nice little walk. What, I'd say about a five, seven minute walk. Seven minute walk.

MN: And what was the -- what was the ethnic composition of the school when you went there? Was it -- was it also a mix?

JSB: Yes, it wasn't predominately Black at all. We had a mix of Italian and Jewish. Most of the teachers were Jewish some Italian. No Black teachers and I would say about 6%, 7% Black youngsters.

MN: Did you recall any tension at the school or - it was a pretty comfortable -

JSB: I was fine [laughs]. Yes, no tension. I knew about racism at that age being apart of things at all so I was alright.

MN: Did your family talk about racism at all in the house. Did they prepare you for things that you would run into. If not in the neighborhood or school some other place where you --

JSB: Yes, quite a bit. And my father was -- was wonderful with current events and history and so he, my mother went right along with the things that he was saying.

MN: So there was political discussion?

JSB: Plenty of political discussion, plenty.

MN: Did your father go to college?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: No. We thought he was brilliant. He went to Alexander Hamilton High school.

And he was great at mathematics and many other things but he was very bright man, very bright.

MN: Now, were they involved in politics, did they belong to any organizations?

JSB: Other than voters, not really.

MN: So they weren't involved

JSB: The local -- no, no, no. Not to my knowledge, no.

MN: So when you -- when we went to the Pruitts they said that the dinner table- when the children sat around -- did you have formals dinner where people sat down and talked about what they did in school or talked about current events? Was it a very structured dinner environment or very informal?

JSB: Well we had a -- I guess you could say -- through composed kind of situation where we would - continually talk about politics, current events, and at the dinner table -- since you bring up the dinner table -- we always had to say the grace. "God is good God is great" Everything before the food came -- "By thy hand must all is fed give us Lord our daily bread." And then from time-to-time, more often than not, we had to sing it in three part harmony. Don't laugh! When we sang it, can you imagine, three or four part harmony.

MN: So music was a big part of your

JSB: I think so! [Laughs]

MN: Describe it for us because this is somewhat -- clearly more than most of the people that we've spoken to. When was your first introduction to music as a child and --

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Well music was played continually even on Home Street. We played -- when I say we played -- I -- the radio was going and maybe because I loved music so much from the time I knew myself I picked right up on it. But music was always going on.

MN: Was there a piano in the house?

JSB: No piano. Can you beat that? No piano with all that

MN: So the music came from the radio or the phonograph?

JSB: The phonograph. Yes.

MN: Now what sort of music did your parents play?

JSB: They played Jazz and they played show tunes and they played classical music and religious music.

MN: So all of those were -- were in the collection of records?

JSB: Exactly.

MN: And -- So you were exposed to all of those -- who -- as you were four or five years old or six, did any pieces of music stand out for you?

JSB: Four or five. Four or five. Pieces of music that stand out.

MN: Or did that come a little later?

JSB: That might have come a little later -- stood out because I just loved it all, so --

MN: And it was there -- it was there -- you know all the time

JSB: Constantly.

MN: And what about other peoples -- was music in the street? Could you hear it coming from other people's apartments?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Yes, because we were able at that time to leave the door open. You could leave your door open and just put a piece of paper in the door or a brick. And we had a slat that we used to use it was a bed --

MN: You felt safe enough to leave your doors open--

JSB: -- put the slat down. Just keep--

MN: At all hours of the day and night and people just go in and out of each other's apartments.

JSB: Exactly. It was wonderful. It was more than a cup of sugar. Ill tell you.

MN: So, how was the block kept safe?

JSB: I don't really know.

MN: Or was the whole neighborhood safe?

JSB: Yes, we just interacted in a way where safety was not a factor that was prominent in any kind of way.

MN: So you weren't told don't go to a certain block there were tough kids there when you were growing up?

JSB: Well we -- yes we -- when we were growing up -- yes things changed a little bit and we were not allowed to, lets say hang out at say Vincents and we used to call it the Spanish store down the street -- the corner.

RG: Are you talking about Louis'?

JSB: Louis', Louis'. That was a grocery store.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Now that was later or that was when you were Ten? Twelve?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Ten -- make it from -- you never were allowed to hang out at Louis' you know so make that six -- from six or seven.

MN: So Louis' was there when you moved down the block?

JSB: I've always known them to be there. My mother might know some other people.

MN: Now so -- before we went on tape you talked about up the corner and down the corner.

JSB: [Laughs] Yes.

MN: So, tell us a little bit about -- kind of the hierarchy of the block and how -- at least as your family perceived -- what was going on on Lyman Place.

JSB: Okay, well the block did have this -- this divide if you will. It was later -- it was just a line in the sand -- but at that time -- well not quite -- the people that lived up the street my mother tended to allow us to make friends with and be with because I think that she felt that they were more aggressive and they were doing things. Their children were involved in the kinds of things that she wanted us to be involved with. Which was -- they went to school regularly they aimed for something, they wanted to be something. Not to say the children down the street didn't. But they hung out later hours and they were in the street. So you can't be in the street and do your homework. You know, and so along those lines and -- she made her decision of who to select, who we could play with, who -- and up the street came to be the way to go.

MN: So, Louis' Grocery--

JSB: Down the street.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

MN: -- became a symbol was a symbol of [crosstalk] what they would call a rougher crowd or [Crosstalk].

JSB: Yes, yes, yes, exactly.

MN: So, you were encouraged avoid that spot.

JSB: Exactly. No, you didn't hang out at Louis'.

MN: Did that make you want to hang out there more or not necessarily?

JSB: Not necessarily. We knew there was trouble down there. We never spelled it out completely, but that's the way it went.

MN: When did your family -- did they become Seventh Day Adventists before you were born?

JSB: Oh no, that came -- lets see --I hate to put years on things that really- I would imagine maybe around 1950 or something like that.

MN: Now what denomination were they before that?

JSB: Before they were Seventh Day Adventists? I really don't know. I know they were always God fearing people. But, I don't really know that their religion was in particular.

MN: Did you go to church in Harlem or in the Bronx?

JSB: I went to church in the -- in Manhattan. Yes, the City Tabernacle Seventh Day Adventist Church. That's on 155th street, yes.

MN: But that -- but before then -- do you recall going to church in Manhattan or in the Bronx?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: No, my mother would allow someone to take me to another -- me and my sister to another Seventh Day Adventist Church in the Bronx. But not as a regular attending thing.

MN: [crosstalk] know St. Augustine's Presbyterian or any other -- Thessalonia Baptist -- any other of the neighboring [crosstalk].

JSB: No, we knew the churches that were around. The Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, the church around the corner. We knew where all the -- and from time to time we would go to a church on -- Reverend --

MN: Right, its now Stebbens.

JSB: Stebbens Avenue. What's that big church on the corner?

RG: Caldwell?

JSB: Caldwell, yes. We would -- affiliation kind of thing. You now, just program or this or that. But not real membership and consistent going there.

MN: Now, did your family allow you to play in the street with other kids or was it pretty much [crosstalk].

JSB: We could go down. Can we go downstairs and play? Yes you can go downstairs and play. But we had curfews and times and we had to be back. We couldn't just to go out and keep on going or anything like that. We had to come back.

MN: Now what were some of the street games you used to play?

JSB: We played Lodies.

MN: Yes.

RG: Lodies.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: [Laughs] That's when you take a -- well if you had a line top you could put some putty in it or you could put orange skin or -which would give it weight so that you could play this game of shooting on the street. We would draw the thing with chalk and at times someone would paint a very nice Lodie -- and we called it Lodies. You know so -- and we also played Hand Slug we called it. You remember Slugs. Slug -- and its like a kind of hand ball with a Spalding ball, a pink Spalding ball. You get that for fifteen cents at the grocery store on Prospect Avenue which is Mr. Pay. If you -- Yes. And you -- whoever had the money would own the ball, you see. [Laughs]

MN: Now, was there any jumping rope?

JSB: Oh, not me but there was rope jumping.

MN: Did any of the girls do double dutch?

JSB: They did double dutch and they also played Potsie.

MN: Yes.

JSB: Yes so that was -- I played a little potsie but not double dutch --

MN: Did boys and girls play much together or was it pretty much separated by gender?

JSB: I think pretty separate yes, by gender.

MN: If you played stick ball the boys wouldn't let you?

JSB: I wanted to though. And I would from time to time but it was mainly the boys that did the stick ball. They'd go the 54th street -- P.S. 54 -- the yard. The school yard. The school yard. Were going to the school -- they said "were going to the school yard." They're going to play stick ball. And skating, they might skate together not too much.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

You'd see a group of boys coming around like you'd see motorcycle people coming around. Well we had skaters that would -- not the single blade -- the skates of that time.

MN: Did you go to the movies much?

JSB: We weren't allowed to go to the movies much.

MN: Okay, as a Seventh Day Adventist you weren't allowed to go to the movies?

JSB: No, yes. We were not allowed to go to the movies very much, no. We wanted to go. I missed out on a lot of movies. Now, maybe my younger sisters -- don't forget I'm the oldest in my family so I think they went to the movies a lot more than I did.

MN: Now, did you get formal music instruction as a child.

JSB: Well I -- yes some.

MN: From private teachers or in the schools?

JSB: My mother enrolled me at the Bronx House School of Music which is now called the Pelham School of Music.

MN: Where is this located?

JSB: That was on the other side -- near Bathgate Avenue. Washington Avenue I think is, yes.

MN: It's called the Bronx House School of Music?

JSB: Yes. It was quite a wonderful school because they not only taught the instrument but they -- whatever your instrument was. Mainly strings and piano, but they -- I don't think they had a dance department- but they also taught music theory. And that's where I -- that was most unusual for a music school. So that by the time I was ready to go to school -- music school -- I had all these theoretics in place.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

MN: Was the clientele multiracial at the school?

JSB: Not to many. Mainly Jewish. Bronx House School of Music, yes.

MN: How old were you?

JSB: I was about 11 or 12 years old. Then I had my uncle **Clarence Brareton**, my mother's brother, who gave me -- took me for violin instruction. And he would come every Monday at four o'clock.

MN: And where would he take you?

JSB: And he would take me to the -- what are houses are they -- they're in Harlem.

Where he lived there was a piano teacher in the building. Her name was Ms. Decohen I forgot her first -- Maurice DeCohen and I would have an hour of study with her and he would bring me back to the Bronx. 2235 Park -- The Riverton Houses. Yes, that's where I would go for this instruction. And I was -- he would bring be back -- come get me in the Bronx in Lyman place and have the lesson I would stay for dinner with my aunt and Uncle. And every Monday -- you might remember this -- they had the -- from 8:30 to 9:00 the Music Hour -- oh gosh I forgot the program -- a television program. And I would watch this classical music rendition of wonderful music every Monday. Isn't that something?

MN: Now at -- were you -- was there much music at P.S. 54.

JSB: They had a band.

MN: They had a band?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: They had a band there and they had a group instruction with Mr.Greenburg -- who was there- he did the horns and woodwinds and all that stuff. And they had Mrs. Zera who did the -- all the strings Viola, violin --

MN: So this was in elementary school.

JSB: Where are we? Elementary?

MN: PS 5.4. Or are you talking about high school?

JSB: Junior high school. No, no.

MN: So did you perform in elementary school?

JSB: No, not at all.

MN: So basically -- so elementary school was just academic?

JSB: Basically, yes and some choral thing. They might have had a choral thing. I'm trying to stretch my head to remember if they had anything. But nothing --

MN: Are there any teachers that had a major impression on you at PS 54 that you remember very vividly good or bad?

JSB: That I remember?

MN: At PS 54, yes.

JSB: A woman named **Grace Valela**. Ms. Valela in first grade. She was wonderful. She would make programs for us and she had a -- took a real interest in all of us. We felt like we were so special. So that was --

MN: In Jr. high I noticed you were a class clown. Did you have a chance to develop those comedic skills in elementary school? Were you a character?

JSB: I don't know.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

MN: Was there anything out of the classroom that was intriguing in P.S. 54. -- stuff going on in the school yard or in the gym or in the hallways.

JSB: I would think so. We had this one teacher by the name of Ms. Gillman. I don't know if you remember Ms. Gillman. And they used to call her not such nice names. And we would make spoofs with her. I wasn't the only one but I was certainly one of them. And I just would find -- had a -- would find the comedic end to things [laughs].

MN: Did you begin getting an audience in junior high school -- I mean in elementary school?

JSB: Well I -- you kind of got to get -- if you are around me for any length of time you were going to be laughing [laughs] .

MN: Okay so that became part of your identity. People would hang around because if they hung around Jacque something funny was going to happen.

JSB: They would -- for instance someone may have gotten a rotten grade in math and -- "this is terrible" -- "again" -- and they'd light up -- "yes it is again isn't it?" [laughs] That kind of stuff.

MN: So, you have pretty good memories of P.S. 54 when you think back on it?

JSB: I certainly do. There is one thing that -- well for me was a drawback. I wanted so much to be part of the band. I want to get in the band. But they somehow thought I could sew so they put me in this **Hawgroves** sewing class. I almost died but there I was.

MN: So they had a band -- they did have a band in the elementary school?

JSB: Are we in the elementary school?

MN: No we're still in 54.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Oh, okay.

MN: We're going to move to P.S. 40 shortly.

JSB: Seems like I'm anxious to graduate [laughter].

MN: So you ran through elementary school, told a few jokes, and got to Junior High School 40.

JSB: I ran through [laughs].

MN: Jr. High School 40 clearly you made an impression because in addition to being class clown it was most talented. So what -- how did you begin to distinguish yourself in that school? Was it through music at that time? Or did you have other talents that other people were thinking about when -- being called most talented is -- I mean I was never called most talented, Jim Pruitt wasn't. So were you performing then?

JSB: I could quote a lot of poetry.

MN: Oh, okay.

JSB: And I loved poetry and I still do. And I would be able to quote a lot of stuff. So I guess they thought "she kind of knows her stuff" and then they knew that I liked music a lot and I was a member of the Glee club. And so they kind of saw me going back --

MN: Now, did you do any theater or acting in school?

JSB: I wasn't involved with plays and drama. They had that there but it wasn't me that was somebody else.

MN: Now, you mentioned reading. Did your family take you to the Morissania Library regularly?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Yes. My mother saw that I go there -- and the other kids too but I don't know if they went to Morrisania -- I cant seem to get a line on who went and who didn't go -- but we were all encouraged to have library cards. We all had library cards.

MN: What was the library like? Was it a major community institution?

JSB: I would think so. It was a community staple. And it was always full, it was used, it wasn't unutilized and to say I was going to the library was not an uncommon -- especially if you were dealing with kids up the street [laughs].

MN: Oh, up the street went to the library, down the street went to Louis'?

[laughter]

JSB: I -- [laughs]

MN: So that was Louis's here and the library here.

JSB: I don't know if it went that clean cut. You see, I don't want the people whop lived down the street to beat me up [laughs].

MN: Okay, so you had to play both sides

JSB: Sort of.

MN: Again, before we were on air you mentioned your family was full of music. But Rhythm and Blues and Rock and Roll were off limits.

JSB: Well a lot of attention wasn't given -- we were encouraged to listen to more the latest the top ten -- well what ever the latest was for R& B and what was the other thing you said?

MN: Rock and Roll. Because I guess when you were in junior high school was the street corner singing culture already alive and well in Morrisania?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Yes, well probably all over the Bronx and Morrisania as well. But we were never told don't -- well it wasn't some sort of mandate you don't listen to this, we just didn't listen to it. And then when we got older we were not encouraged to listen to it [laughs]. Then my father was saying some disparaging things about it after a while, yes.

MN: What about dances? Were you allowed to go to dances?

JSB: No, now that's the religious thing we didn't --

MN: What did -- Archibald mentioned--

JSB: The Hunts Point Palace? Was that it?

MN: The Hunts Point Palace had the greatest dances.

JSB: I missed all of that.

MN: And then there were these dollar dances that Arthur Crier and Archibald used to have where there was something for a dollar and there was some grinding going on.

JSB: I'm sure there was [laughs].

MN: So that's where the religious --

JSB: Yes we just didn't -- I talked to my sisters and -- yes we went maybe you didn't go but we went [laughs].

MN: When you were in junior high school were you aware of gangs in the neighborhood? Was that something -- a big subject of discussion?

JSB: Gangs weren't'- no there were bad kids. But we hadn't gotten into gangs and Bloods and Cryps and Creeps and all that kind of thing.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

MN: Okay what now I want to switch gears is to the relationship with your uncle Thelonius Monk. Now how old were you when you were aware that your uncle was a professional musician.

JSB: Well I was born in 1938. So, when -- people say "when did you meet him?" Well I say "he was at the house." He was there and I -- and he wasn't famous then not back in 1938. So, he was working on becoming well known and getting his music out there. So we -- I'm more in the early -- early for me -- process of it so that came much later.

MN: Now did you always have copies of his records?

JSB: Always. Sure, yes.

MN: So, how old were you when -- when did he first begin recording.

JSB: I really -- he might have recorded before I was born. I don't know.

RK: Well his first recording was in 1944.

JSB: 1944? So that would put me -- if I'm 4,5,6 years old.

MN: Yes so that was his first recording in 1944?

RG: ?????

JSB: The first thing that, yes, the first thing that I heard -- and I said that's what I want to do in -- was Round Midnight -- Round Midnight on Blue Note Records. Now, lets see. When did that happen then I can do my own age.

RG:????????/

JSB: 1948?

MN: And that had the biggest influence on you?

JSB: The biggest.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

MN: And how often was he at your home as you were -- when you were growing up?
Before the fire when he actually moved in. How regularly did you see him?

JSB: I could easily say every day but I'm going to -- once a week.

MN: Once a week?

JSB: Yes, we saw him a lot.

MN: Now did this make you a celebrity on the block having a musician who is
reasonably well known to visit you all the time.

JSB: I wasn't aware of it. He was just Uncle Thelonius coming by. That was it. Isn't
that something?

MN: The kids didn't come up to you and ask for his autograph or anything like that?

JSB: Never had any of that.

MN: Now, was -- Elmo Hope lived on the block.

JSB: He lived in the middle of the block and that was alright.

MN: Lets talk about Elmo Hope and also then about your uncle's relationship with him
as far as you remember it.

JSB: Well we called him Mr. Elmo and he -- Uncle Thelonius, Mr. Elmo if you will,
were almost like the -- they were they musicians for us. And we would see them together.
And there were times, from time to time, not a lot but enough to say that I would go to
the Hope home, met with his mother and there was a piano there --

MN: Oh they had a piano there?

JSB: Oh, yes, yes. And they would take turns playing like -- Robin would play --

MN: Did they ever let you play?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: They let me play. Yes, they let me bang.

[Laughter]

JSB: And they would sit there and swear -- they would sit there and listen to it and laugh with each other "See what she did?"

[Laughter]

And I'd say to myself "yes, see what she did", oops!

RG: How old were you then?

JSB: I might have been, what? About 10, 11, something like that.

MN: So you were hanging out with them?

JSB: Hanging out and didn't even know there was a word hanging out. I later learned that I was hanging out. That's what I was doing. I was just going by --

MN: And did the other kids follow you there?

JSB: I don't think they -- I don't think so. You would have to really ask them but they never spoke of it like I'm just able to tell it to you.

MN: Now, did they ever have other musicians visit them to jam with them at Elmo Hope's Apartment?

JSB: All the time. Sure they had Tina Brooks, they had Al Walker although I think they would go over to Al Walker's house he lived on Home street -- I don't --

MN: So this is another musician who lived in the area.

JSB: Yes, another Bronx musician.

MN: And what was his instrument?

JSB: Piano.

MN: Another keyboard person?

JSB: Yes, they weren't all keyboard people --

MN: Tina Brooks was a --

JSB: Played Sax. Fabulous.

MN: Were there any other people who would come over to jam with them?

JSB: I was thinking of Nikki **Selwith** but he's another piano player. Do you know Nikki?

RG: I remember that name.

JSB: Yes. And then there was -- there's another -- any number of -- Oliver Bean. I don't know if Oliver did anything with them. You know Oliver.

RG: Yes.

JSB: I don't really know but I might have my time thing off a little bit. I might want to say with my sisters and brothers -- they might have -- other things with Thelonius. But coming to the house, maybe they might have.

MN: But you were there when they were playing?

JSB: Yes.

MN: And they knew you loved this and liked having you around.

JSB: Oh, yes.

MN: Now when Thelonius and Elmo were together in the neighborhood what were the clubs -- what were the places they would go to visit. What bars or clubs?

JSB: Well, they'd go to Al Walkers house -- I know that's not a bar -- but they'd go to Al Walker's house. They would go hang out with Tina. They would probably the 845

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

club, probably the Blue Morocco. I don't want to start making up stuff where I don't know where they went. But when I went to spots where Jazz was played in the Bronx, I'm so sure, I can almost bet that they were there.

MN: Now you were not allowed to go to these places?

JSB: Too young. I'm 12, I'm 13.

MN: Did you ever get to see your uncle perform in concerts outside of a club setting where you would be too young?

JSB: I saw the Town Hall concert.

MN: What year was that?

JSB: What year was that? The big orchestra with **Hall Overton**.

RG: I think it was 1959.

JSB: 1959.

MN: So your basic exposure was through his records and through him playing at Elmo's House?

JSB: And at his own house a tremendous amount. But that was -- I'm mainly telling you what happened in the Bronx. But it shifts.

MN: And where were the places he was living in Manhattan?

JSB: One place that I know.

MN: That was on 162nd street?

JSB: 243 West 63rd, yes.

MN: So, you visited him all the time. And there he had a piano?

JSB: Oh, then we just relaxed and listened until we fell asleep or something.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

MN: Bob mentioned the Baroness.

JSB: Yes.

MN: Okay, when did you start seeing the Baroness show up on Lyman Place?

JSB: Well--

MN: And tell us a little about the Baroness.

JSB: Okay, Thelonius was the type of guy that he would introduce -- lets say we're going to make you Clinton for a minute for minute if you don't mind -- Well he wouldn't say Jacque I'd like you to meet President Clinton. He would say President Clinton I want you to meet Jacque. So he would bring whomever he was in his -- his family members -- in this case the Baroness -- This is Jacque, this is Sunny, this is -- like that. So, when I met her in the Bronx he brought her to the Bronx we wanted to know more about her and we found out that she was a tremendous advocate of Jazz and other Jazz musicians. Thelonius would -- right now were doing Thelonius -- and she would be a clubs and she would take him to the different spots where he was playing. And that's how we got to know her as a person who --

MN: No she was -- what car did she drive? Do remember her car?

JSB: Yes I do. She would drive a Bentley. And so we lived on the fifth floor and when she came through the house with -- came through the block with the top down, here's a white woman in a Bentley, all of the heads -- "who is that?" [Laughter] And it was -- I think at that point I thought Uncle Thelonius must be kind of important -- I mean to the world. He was always important to us.

MN: So this was a significant curiosity.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Oh indeed. Oh my goodness.

MN: Did that end up giving you a bit of added muster when --

JSB: I think so, getting in the -- [whispers] "there they go" -- in the Bentley.

MN: And he would take you in the Bentley too?

JSB: I would go right in there, yes I would.

MN: Are there any pictures of you in the Bentley?

JSB: No, we should have taken some but I don't think I ever did. Maybe they have some, the family might have some but I don't have any.

MN: Now, Robert you had been told before about some of the stuff that was going on between Thelonius and Elmo Hope at Club 845. Yes, what did you come up with in terms of that because anyone

RK: **INAUDIBLE!!!!!!**

JSB: Yes they were, yes they were.

MN: **Kert Powell** came to the block also?

JSB: Kert Powell came to the house. He was the quite eccentric fellow.

MN: As opposed to Monk.

JSB: And Elmo yes he was now the --

MN: Just a few what Powell would say. When you say eccentric, in what way?

JSB: Well we had a dog and his name was Jojo and he would bark -- a little Chihuahua and Chow mix -- and he barked, he would bark at that bag. And certainly when a stranger -- and I'm speaking about Powell—he barked and barked something terrible.

"Stop it" -- "stop that" -- well Powell just stared at him. And we thought that maybe he

was maybe going to do away with the barking and him. So we just said, we better put him away.

[Laughter]

RK: **INAUDIBLE!!**

MN: Oh sure

JSB: Never took a lesson because we didn't have a piano --

MN: This was before you went to music school?

JSB: Yes, yes, yes. Right exactly. I didn't say here let me play my lesson because I wasn't -- yes, yes. So I was doing it whatever came -- actually I was trying to do like how they did a little bit. And then I would loose it after a while, if you will, if you can give me that -- I was pretty lost when I got there -- but anyway, and do what I wanted to do. And they would -- they made -- I've got to tell you something -- they always were interested. Any move that they made any note they were on it like this. Something was really going on so they made me feel -- I don't know if they -- they made me feel important that I was doing something. So when I would stop, Mark I would want to stop and they'd say you want more? [Laughter] Here it is.

MN: And you've been playing ever since.

JSB: Exactly, yes, yes. And they definitely -- even in the, I mean --that was before the five lines and four spaces, you know what I'm saying? So that -- I had an okay, I had an okay from them -- It kind of fills me up a little -- to be authentic. It was alright before I ever got into book 1, book 2, book 3. I don't know how much of this is -- yes.

MN: **No this is**

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: It was okay. And do you have some **gusum oil**? That kind of thing. I cant tell you how that can carry you. So I just wanted to make sure that I got that in.

MN: Now, there's -- people have also talked of a famous stoop incident.....

JSB: Actually I wasn't there. I have a sister named Evelyn we called her **Weetee**, she could really tell you. I think she was there a very -- but she's the one for the stoop incident. In fact -- the fact that I knew that the darn thing fell in --

MN: Now this was your building?

JSB: This was Elmo Hope's building. Yes, yes.

MN: So they had a stoop.

RG: INAUDIBLE!!!!!!!

JSB: Exactly. It was not uncommon to sit on the stoop and get fresh air.

RG: Exactly. [**Inaudible**]

MN: This is a concrete stoop? It fell down?

RG: It fell down but fortunately I don't think anyone was really hurt.

JSB: No.

MN: Like how high? This was like your normal stoop?

JSB: 1, 2, 3 -- what, about 5 steps? 4 steps yes.

RG: Inaudible

JSB: Down the street [laughs].

MN: Wow so --

RG:

JSB: Yes, my sister might know. I have a sister who --

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

MN: Now, when did you first notice that heroin was starting to come into the neighborhood? Because it seems like different blocks at different times. What was your recollection of that?

JSB: One of my neighbors, Richard Manson, died in his sleep. I might have been about 15 years old. His mother came over, Mrs. Manson, and she asked me to come over because Ritchie's not moving. And that's when I realized that -- what did he die of? And it was an overdose of drugs.

MN: This was 1953 or so?

JSB: I was born in 1938 -- something like that, yes.

MN: And was this something that people like, this time were you in high school or junior high school?

JSB: Where would that put me, 15 years old? Getting ready to go --

RG: High school.

JSB: High school, yes.

MN: So is this something that people were talking about?

JSB: Yes. "Oh so and so's on drugs". It was a big deal.

MN: And this was happening at different points in the neighborhood.

JSB: Exactly, up and down the street.

MN: So, it hit Lyman Place up and down the block.

JSB: Yes.

MN: And did it erode the sense of safety that you grew up with?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Well certainly. We couldn't keep that door open like we used to. We lived on the top floor and a lot of the addicts would go to the roof so we had to keep the door shut, we couldn't keep it open anymore.

MN: Is this the early 1940s or the early 1950s?

JSB: This is the 1950s.

MN: So, you -- its almost -- when you moved there it sounds like this is an absolutely idyllic place --

JSB: Exactly.

MN: And then was heroin the first thing that began to shake that sense that you were living in this really -- world that was really special.

End of Transcription from Videotape

JSB: I think so. I'm sure people that were alcoholics but that didn't, you know -- so and so's husband drinks. But that wasn't -- but this was with the young people.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Was it mostly the --

JSB: Young males.

MN: Young males.

JSB: Yes.

MN: And it really -- and it affected both sides of the block.

JSB: Yes and then we had the experience of my -- my own cousin who had -- who grew up with us like he was like a brother and we lost him when he was 23 and so we knew it was --

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

MN: Wow. And what year was that? Do you remember?

JSB: I ought to know that but --

RG: Around 1956, 1957 --

JSB: I think around 1960.

RG: It might have been the early 1960's, yes.

JSB: In the late -- around 1960.

MN: And who was his father -- was this?

JSB: This is Nelly -- my aunt Nelly's sister -- or my other aunt. Her son.

MN: And he was also in Morrisania? Or is he in a different --

JSB: He would be living in my -- our -- my household.

RG: Oh he lived in your --

JSB: Right, yes.

MN: In your apartment?

JSB: Yes.

MN: So you had -- you lost someone to an overdose in your own --

JSB: Yes.

MN: Wow! Okay so that -- because Robins -- when we interviewed **Robinson Frank Adu**

he said it was very personal to him and he wouldn't -- he didn't want to talk about it.

JSB: He wouldn't talk about it.

MN: So this hit -- this really hit hard.

JSB: Then we knew drugs was bad, it was here, we knew it for other people but now we really knew it.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

MN: Did this make people start thinking, you know, we ought to move out of here? Was this what began to put the sense that --

JSB: Families that were beginning to move -- they were moving to Co-op City. They were moving to --

MN: But that would be -- but that's late 60's-- Co-op. Co-op City is the 6-- is like 1968.

JSB: Well then they were moving to Long Island --

MN: To Long Island Road.

RG: Long Island Road, yes.

MN: But they were -- families on the block were starting to move out in the 1950's.

JSB: Beginning to -- yes, they said you know that places get bad and Simpson Street is getting this and they couldn't come late at in a safe way anymore.

MN: Okay so there was a certain point at which people couldn't -- were afraid to walk home from the subway at night?

JSB: Late at night accept in two's and all of that.

MN: And that was in the 1950's that it started.

JSB: I would think so. That would be the beginnings of it.

MN: Because its interesting in the Patterson Houses it was -- that happened in the 1960's.

JSB: A little bit later?

MN: Yeah it happened a little -- that -- what I'm finding is this hit different neighborhoods --

RG: At different times.

MN: It hit Kelly Street in the late 1940's. It hit earlier there. But -- so that --

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: I could see that. Beause we was talking about Kelly Street -- as each bunch of -- I didn't mean to cut across you.

MN: No, no please.

JSB: Each block got bad or each couple of blocks -- our worlds beginning to --

MN: Constrict and you start to feel -- well we've got to be careful here.

JSB: Constrict a little bit. Don't go here--

MN: So that happened-- and you said -- but that was when you were in high school you would say when that, or even earlier?

JSB: Well I lost my cousin in -- no it was older than that. But other people were dying. When thinking of Richard, I was about 15 years old so that would put it at about--what nineteen fifty--

MN: And that's when you attended the Commercial High School in Manhattan.

JSB: Yes, yes. Around there.

MN: And then you start to feel

JSB: That's exactly right.

MN: And then you start to feel "I don't feel safe going here, I don't feel safe going there."

JSB: Exactly, exactly. And then some of the shops were beginning to move away because they were being hit with robberies.

MN: Oh, Okay. So you started to get rob -- apartment robberies and store robberies

JSB: And Store robberies.

MN: And that's in the 1950's.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Yes.

RG: Late 50's.

JSB: Yes. You've got it. Yes.

MN: So you could sense the neighborhood fraying and you felt--

JSB: Yes and we'd go to -- I don't know if you remember Granitors the pharmacy place right on -- remember Granitors right near the warehouse where the meat packing place?

RG: That was on prospect --

JSB: Across the street on Prospect -- across the street from Dr. Good?

RG: Prospect? Sure, yes.

JSB: Dr. Good, the doctor that we would go to.

RG: Yes the fam -- yes.[crosstalk].

JSB: He put up an extra door, more locks. People were buying more locks. The stores were closing, shifting their hours -- the liquor store. Everybody was -- was on edge.

MN: And this is when you were in high school?

JSB: Yes.

RG: Yes, this was in the 1950's.

JSB: You start seeing these little changes. Little big changes.

MN: Big changes. Now what year was it that your uncle Thelonus came to move in with you?

JSB: Lets see. When was the first fire? It always has to do with the --

Robin Kelly (RK): The first fire was -- I thought 1956.

JSB: About 1956. Something like that, yes.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

RK: And the second one in 1961.

MN: So how long in each period did he stay with you?

JSB: Did he stay? Well to get the -- for the Graham brothers to fix the place up and all of that kind of-- cause those were electrical fires. They had to really tear down the -- I would say at least 8 months to a year. Easy.

MN: And that was in 1956?

JSB: First fire.

MN: And the second fire was --

JSB: Bristol street -- they were there a little bit longer. Maybe about two years or better.

MN: So he was living in Lyman place in 1956 for about 8 months. And then in 1961 for two years.

JSB: Roughly.

MN: And this was with his wife?

JSB: Always with his wife. Everybody had to get out.

MN: And he had children.

JSB: Yes, two children. One is since passed away but his son is still alive.

MN: So your family seems to have taken in a lot of people over the years.

JSB: Oh, yes.

MN: Could you describe what that was like and --

JSB: My father was a real lover of music and musicians and he was an open hearted guy. So there was always another place at the table for a musician. You didn't have to be a musician [crosstalk].

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

MN: Were there other people other than the people who knew Thelonius who were come -- would -- you were saying who would stay with you or getting a meal with you that you know who you might want to mention.

JSB: Well if a family member got into any difficulty or fell on hard times or anything like that, our home was the home to come to when someone --

MN: How many rooms did you have?

JSB: 138. I'm only kidding.

[Laughter]

MN: How many bedrooms did the apartment have?

JSB: The apartment have. Lets see. 1,2,3 -- Lets see. 1,2,3 -- three bedrooms.

MN: You had three bedrooms and there were how many of -- children?

JSB: We were a family of nine. Mother, father and seven children.

MN: Oh there were seven of you?

JSB: Yes.

MN: And you took in Thelonius, his wife and two children.

JSB: Yes.

MN: That made thirteen.

JSB: Yes.

MN: And then you also took in another family?

JSB: Usually no. This didn't happen at the same time. But were talking--

MN: Now where did -- okay let's say Thelonius' family move in. Where did they sleep?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Alright, so -- we also at that time -- I don't know if people still do it, I'm sure they do -- the couch. The folding couches.

MN: We still -- we have that.

JSB: Folding couch. So that made the living room yet another room. And one of the rooms were -- we had something small and you open that up and that makes it -- trust me, everybody got -- was able to sleep.

MN: So every -- did kids sleep in bunk beds or did they sleep in the same beds.

JSB: We didn't have bunk beds -- isn't that something? We didn't have the bunk beds because you figure that's too -- but we just doubled up the best way we could.

MN: So you would have two people in the bed?

JSB: Easy. No one had their own bed except my mother and father. You know, they would have --

MN: Oh really? So, people were sleeping and it would -- okay. And you never felt like hard pressed by that?

JSB: Well we always ideally wanted our own room. We wanted a house we wanted all that but we always looked at that. But we always looked at that -- well that's what goes on when things get better. But right now were making due, were stretching ourselves were going to get the --

MN: What was the food like that was served in your house. Because I mean that's a lot of people to feed. Were there formal dinners or people eating in shifts or --

JSB: We -- Well the children usually all sat down. Sometimes both parents didn't at the same time. But my mother made the meals or my sister and I -- my sister was a real

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

cook. She -- and she is still a fabulous cook. But most of the time all of the children ate at the table. We didn't have too much eating all over the house business. And then like you said whatever the family that was there -- two or three people. It was never -- I can't make it uncrowded but it was done in such a way that we never felt that we were -- gosh there's no place for me to sit [crosstalk].

MN: Now did you ever finally get a piano?

JSB: Finally yes.

MN: And what year was the piano --

JSB: I got a George **Steck** Piano which Thelonius picked out. Yes, lets see I think that was around 1956. That's exactly when it was, 1956.

MN: Okay and how did you get a piano into a five story walk-up?

JSB: Well they take the legs off and turn it this way. I had a baby grand. Yes, yes.

MN: And so there was one piano and so there was always somebody playing?

JSB: There was always someone playing it.

RK: Its got a baby grand, a George Steck baby grand. So, who -- was it really expensive?

JSB: Yes, I paid for it.

[Laughter]

JSB: Yes, for then. Now it would be like --

MN: Now, so then people would come and jam in your house?

JSB: Well, no we didn't have like great big jams. There was a lot of activity around the piano because we loved the music. My father got to play on it a lot.

MN: Oh did your father --

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Yes, I wished I taped him, you know.

MN: Now he was a keyboard person?

JSB: He really played mandolin. Yes, he was a mandolin player. But he had a lot of fun on that piano.

MN: Now --

JSB: And the local musicians **Mickey Selcridge** would come and play and --oh there's a couple of people their names don't come to me but --

MN: Now, was Maxine Sullivan like an -- at that place she called the House of Jazz?

JSB: It has the Jack built to it.

MN: It has the Jazz Built?

JSB: Yes.

MN: Where was that located? Was it like in a brownstone? Do you remember that at all?

MN: Here's where I need my sister again because we -- **Weetee** has exactly where it is. But I can get that for you.

RG: I think it was **Ritter Place**.

JSB: Ritter Place. Yes that's it Ritter Place.

RG: Ritter Place off of Prospect Avenue. Not too far from us.

JSB: And that's where one of the Graham brothers lived who did so much work in Thelonius's house, lived on Ritter Place

RK: Oh, okay.

JSB: Yes.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

MN: Okay, just to go back -- you weren't -- well this is pretty amazing what you were exposed to -- but you didn't go to the talent shows at P.S. 99 where a lot of the Rhythm and Blues artists were competing against each other in the evenings.

JSB: Missed all that. Sorry I did but I honestly did. Yes, I missed all of that. Anything Jazz. I probably -- if you had the Rhythm and Blues person they may not have done the Jazz things and then vice versa. [crosstalk]

MN: Now did you go to clubs in like 52nd street when --

JSB: I went to the Five Spot. Me and my sister Judith we would -- I went to the Five Spot a lot.

MN: And where was that located?

JSB: 5 Cooper Square. Yes, yes. That was fabulous because we were a little under age. You know what I'm saying to you? So we would -- he would bring us in and we heard everybody. Not everybody, **everybody**.

[Laughter]

MN: Now did they all come to visit him. Did everybody come to visit -- come to your house to see him up there?

JSB: Not as much as probably came to his own house, you know, so we would -- if he was with **Sonny Rollins** then -- that day -- then Sonny was with him. Thelonius always had musicians with him. They saw how he lived on a daily basis. "I got to go to the cleaners now", or, "I've got to do this or that."

MN: So was he somebody like at ease in the neighborhood when he was living there?

JSB: He was huge. He was a big guy. Nobody was going to mess with him.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

MN: Was he the kind of person who'd stop to talk to somebody in the street or --

JSB: Everybody who he knew. Yes, yes very much yes. Very personable, very outgoing, yes. And ask you what you doing, yes, easily. Nothing to it.

MN: So, he'd go to the cleaners and he'd go to the grocery store and all that?

JSB: Well he was -- yes, if he was stopped -- he wasn't like a guy who necessarily did mundane things.

MN: Right, yes.

JSB: On the other hand, he'd want to know what kind of pen is that you got? "What kind of pen is that?"

[Laughter]

[Crosstalk]

JSB: And you'd say "Well this is an" -- whatever kind it is. Exactly. He's interested in -- "where did you get them socks from?" [laughter] He would ask that kind of thing or your haircut or -- just a regular -- he was asking regular questions. Not famous people's questions.

MN: How old were you when you stated to think I'm not going to live in this neighborhood all my life and I've got to start thinking about going somewhere else.

JSB: Well I got a part scholarship to go to a Seven Day Adventist college. And that's how I left home going to Atlantic Union College.

MN: And where is that located?

JSB: That's in South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

MN: And what year did you go there -- did you leave [crosstalk]?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: What year did I leave? Probably 1958.

MN: Okay so you went to Massachusetts --

JSB: I left the piano there. [Laughs]

MN: And went to college --

JSB: Yes.

MN: And then how many years did you --

JSB: I was there a good year and I came back home and I got married in 1960. And I was --

MN: Where did -- where did you move when you got married?

JSB: To Brooklyn.

MN: Oh, so you and your husband moved to Brooklyn.

JSB: Exactly. 364 Hopkinson Avenue.

MN: Hopkins--! My grandparents lived on Hopkins. And how close to **Pipkin**?

JSB: About two blocks down because I lived on --

MN: Two blocks south? I was -- we were on that same block in like one of those two family houses.

JSB: Oh, I know the houses.

MN: Sutter --I -- we could have been two -- my grandparents lived in that block and then moved to a housing project in Rockaway Parkway. My grandfather sold herring in the streets of Brownsville till he was 87 year old.

JSB: Well that's -- oh --

MN: Hopkinson Avenue! Oh my God.

JSB: Yes. And lived -- I lived -- right at the corner was the Eastern Parkway.

MN: Oh, I know --

JSB: You know where I lived.

MN: Yes, this is my turf.

JSB: Yes. That's my first place to move from that Lyman Place.

MN: So you moved in 1960.

JSB: Yes I did.

MN: So you were an example of the people who were moving out.

JSB: And then here comes -- Exactly. Yes.

MN: Now, did you come back to Lyman Place after you and your husband moved?

JSB: Not to live. That -- Once I was gone --

MN: No not to live but come to visit.

JSB: Visit back and forth? Sure, sure. Because my mother was still there. My family was there.

MN: Now, how long did your family stay on the block?

JSB: How long? Oh, I would imagine they moved maybe five years later, four or five years later.

MN: So in 1965, 1966?

JSB: But something like that. They were not living there anymore.

MN: And Bob, when did your family leave?

RG: My -- they moved in 1963.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

MN: Okay, so. Now Bunchie's --Tell us a little about the Foxes. You were saying that people looked -- So they were the people to aspire to.

JSB: Yes, some say.

MN: So tell us a little bit about them.

JSB: They were a family from the Caribbean. I don't know exactly -- I don't -- I think her father was a printer. You probably have more information on what the father and mother did. But they were one of the biggest reasons why they were looked up to and this is really great in its -- I guess it always will. They owned property they owned their house.

MN: Yes.

JSB: And the sister lived downstairs. So they were a family sharing and building and all that kind of stuff. Then the next thing is that the -- her brother went to college -- what was his name again?

RG: Freddy.

JSB: Freddy went to college.

RG: Yes.

JSB: So that was big news. And Bunchie went to --I think she went to St. Helena.

RG: Hunter. She went to Hunter.

JSB: Hunter, Hunter. But where did she go for high school? St Helena? Yes, she went to a Catholic school.

RG: Oh, I don't remember.

MN: She went to a Catholic School.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: You have to pay a little money to go to Catholic school.

MN: She didn't go to public school. She went to **St. Anthony Apatchoua** school. So she had – right.

JSB: Exactly. So her -- yes -- so her --

MN: They were a little --

JSB: Well they could have -- they were paying the private schools. I don't know if they were music lessons and all this kind of stuff but they had a lot of things that people who didn't have it were trying to get. And they were really sure enough doing it. And the main -- they owned their house and all the things that I just said. And that's why there were someone to look up to and try to be like in those kinds of ways. We thought she was a little snooty and like [laughter].

MN: Now she was a -- did you -- were you aware that she was a very good athlete?

JSB: I -- yes. And then a lot of their life was kind of closed to us because we weren't doing those activities. We don't know what they were doing. All we knew was nice. But we didn't know exactly what it was.

MN: So you didn't play organized sports in school. They didn't have organized girl's teams in the public schools?

JSB: Well we had the gym. The gym period and like that.

MN: Yes, but you didn't have an actual basketball team. Because that's what she described at St. Anthony's was being on a team.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Possibly. I don't know now. You don't have to -- maybe in private school you get all that. The public schools at that time -- I don't know them to have it unless they had it and I didn't know about it.

MN: Did you take advantage of the after school programs in the public schools. You know that they had every public school had an after school center and a night center. But did you -- you were not part of those.

JSB: I wasn't. Maybe my sisters were. But, a lot farther down the line.

MN: Now --

JSB: Because I had to come home and help my mother to take care of the young.

MN: Okay so as the oldest child you had a lot --

JSB: I missed a lot of children stuff that would -- I didn't get quite all that.

MN: I -- before I go into wind up questions, Robin or Bob do you have any questions you want to --

RK: Jacque, what you're saying is so interesting because obviously we lived on the same block at the same time. But we were talking earlier before we went into this formal interview about the creativity, the specialness of Lyman Place. Can you elaborate on that, what was your sense of it was?

JSB: Well everybody was doing something. "Oh there's Mr. Speed. He" -- whether they got paid for it or not volunteer or whatever, their hobby, advocacy or anything like that we don't know. All we know is that there were a lot of doers on that block. You could always identify someone with what they were doing. And it wasn't until later that I

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

realized just how creative that is to have so many people doing something that as children we could markedly see that they were doing good things. Yes.

MN: Were most of the families on the block two-parent families?

JSB: Yes, yes, yes. And we didn't know of -- much of -- hadn't heard much of even as listening to what older people said about separations and divorces. And if a young girl had a baby that was like, "Oh boy." That was -- and we didn't have much of it so it was a big deal. Now teenage pregnancy is nothing like that .

RG: I know one of the things that strikes me about Lyman Place is that there was -- it was like a family block

JSB: Yes it was, yes.

RG: I mean even the interaction was in spite of the differences up the corner or down the corner it was -- everybody got along. There wasn't' an overt animosity among people within the block. Families looked out for one another. There was a personal touch to the --

JSB: Also we were into -- "Well so and so's ready for high school. What's he going to do now?" For instance Leo Mitchell the drummer, in the block down the street if you will, he went to music and art.

MN: So you had a well known drummer came from the block?

RG: Yes, Leo Mitchell, yes.

JSB: Leo Mitchell. Yes, yes.

MN: Who has he played with?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

RG: Leo played with a number of musicians but he became noted for playing with Chet Baker.

JSB: Yes.

RG: In fact he was Chet Baker's last drummer.

JSB: Was he really? You've got -- I don't know that Junior Cars ever did. Do you know what he did?

RG: No but you had Harrison Cruise for example who was an artist.

JSB: You had Stanley Harris. I don't know if you knew where Stanley lived in the building.

RG: No.

JSB: And he became quite a well known social worker and all that kind of thing. If you weren't well known you got degrees. Yes, that kind of stuff.

MN: Now were you aware of what Bob and his friends were doing in the African Jazz Arts Society?

JSB: With the **Naturally** shows?

RG: It's **Naturally** shows.

JSB: Sure. Yes we would attend them and I spoke of Black Rose who I saw the other day. She was someone who was part of your --

RG: She was a model in the show.

JSB: A model and she would make clothes. She wasn't from Lyman Pace but she was involved with them and so they're from Lyman. They did good things and they knew

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

other people that did real nice -- what we felt was real nice stuff. And there are other people they just don't come to mind.

RG: Oh yes, for example were you aware that one of the first Black models came off of Lyman place.

JSB: No.

RG: Yes she lived in 1365.

JSB: Really? Who was that?

RG: Yes. So it was -- her name was Juanita Aikins.

JSB: Oh, I know the name. I remember Juanita Aikins, yes.

RG: Yes, certainly.

MN: Was she up the block or down the block.

RG: No she was kind of in the middle.

[Crosstalk]

RG: But, late it was known that she was the first as far as we know. She was the first Black model to earn a living professionally as a model.

JSB: And we expected Bunchie to do great things.

RG: Yes.

JSB: We thought she was she was just going to be Bunchie and her brother Freddy --

RG: Freddy, yes.

JSB: I -- the younger sister. I've forgotten her name. But she teaches college. Iona. Not Iona. That's the hope. I've forgotten her, yes. And the Kemps and they were another family that did some -- And of course you (Robert Gumbs) [laughs] .

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

RG: In the tradition of Lyman Place.

[Laughter]

JSB: Yes.

RG: But also going back to Monk. I know that certainly on us growing up he did make an impression. Just the fact that he was on the block.

JSB: On the block, yes.

RG: And we could tell people Thelonius Monk is on our block.

JSB: Yes, exactly.

RG: They'd say, "We saw him in a club." Id say, "Yes but we saw him on our block."

[Laughs] So that was --

MN: That could make a difference too.

RG: Oh it was because we saw him -- we saw the personal side of him.

JSB: Exactly. **Skippy -- the Fambrose**. Do you remember them? I don't know what they did.

RG: No, I don't know what happened once they left.

JSB: Now, Vincent McKewen who played trumpet, he was not on the block [crosstalk]

RG: No he came from Prospect Avenue.

JSB: I see, yes. Along with **Oliver Beana** who was my Brother in Law. And he played the trumpet.

RG: Yes. Another factor -- here again Jacque attest to that the fact that junior high school --

JSB: Aretha Franklin.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

RG: Yes, the music and art program in junior high school had a tremendous impact on the people in the community.

JSB: Yes it did.

RG: Because it was often times their first introduction to music art.

MN: And people could take home instruments.

RG: That's right, yes.

JSB: They could take -- yes. Do they still let them take them home now?

MN: No, they eliminated music in the public schools in the 1970's with the fiscal crisis. This is -- listen to this. This music teacher in my wife's elementary school that I told you about --

JSB: Yes.

MN: He found rotting instruments in the basement of the school. They did the same thing in the local junior high school. They had had bands and then only now with private funding are starting to restore them. This used to be all -- **Howie Evans** said he thought the worst thing that ever happened in New York City was closing the after school and evening programs and taking music out of the schools.

RG: Without a doubt.

MN: The fiscal crisis -- so, kids today don't have anywhere close to the opportunities that you had growing up in the 1940's and 1950's.

RG: Now you were special because you had certain musicians that you associated with and certainly a famous uncle.

JSB: Yes.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

RG: But for the average person their first introduction was school.

RK: This leads me to my question about why you weren't in the band in junior high school.

JSB: Yes.

RK: I was curious about that because they put you in sewing.

JSB: In sewing. And I don't really -- I never really figured out how they part the waters on that, who gets to go --

RK: Was the band mostly boys?

JSB: Yes. I don't want to jump on that and make that [inaudible] because I really don't know why it was mainly boys.

RK: Did they have auditions?

JSB: For those classes? No, I don't know. That's what I'm saying. I never knew what made it an -- I really freaked out. I didn't want to sew [laughs].

RG: Well I can answer that because I was in the music program.

JSB: At the same school?

RG: Yes, right. So there were auditions.

JSB: Were there?

RG: Yes, in fact the music program consisted of three bands, of three musical organizations. You had the orchestra, which I was a member, you had the band, which consisted of males and females playing all types of instruments. Then you had a Jazz band which was also very unique at that time.

JSB: You were in that too?

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

RG: No. I was not. But in answer to your question there was a format there was a formula for people getting in.

RK: Were there local bands and young people just organized. You know how a lot of neighborhoods have -- people get together and they jam?

RG: Yes, well a lot of that came out of junior high school 40.

MN: But also there were bands that jammed at the talent shows a P.S. 99.

RG: Exactly at P.S. 99.

MN: Because Joe Orange and Jimmy Owens who lived at 168th street --

RG: And who also went to P.S. 40 --

MN: -- used to jam with Joe -- with Freddy Orange who lived on Prospect Avenue.

RK: Is this -- you mean the trumpet player.

MN: Yes.

RK: Oh, okay.

JSB: Jimmy Owens! Yes, yes.

MN: He lived on 168th street --

JSB: Yes, right.

MN: -- and the Orange, Joe Orange, who I'm on touch with became a trombone player but he went with Jacque Wilson and King Curtis.

JSB: Oh I see, yes.

MN: And his brother went the Jazz route and he went the --

JSB: R& B thing.

MN: R & B route.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

JSB: Yes, yes.

MN: So, and then **Arthur Crier** went the pop -- the R & B --

JSB: Yes. The records which he played for me.

MN: So -- and these are all people -- and its interesting is that the different musical cultures didn't always cross but its all within five blocks of each other.

JSB: Yes. Its amazing. Yes, yes.

MN: I mean that's the story that has to be told. I mean who -- no one knows this.

JSB: Yes.

MN: And its in the same neighborhood where Hip Hop comes out like later.

RG: I have a question for Jacque. Thelonius Monk wrote a tune called Jacque-ing.

JSB: Yes.

RG: Was it named after you and dedicated to you?

JSB: Yes.

RG: How did that come about?

JSB: I don't know. I was at his house at 248 West 63rd Street and he played it a little -- would play something he was writing. He didn't have a title and then on a page -- half of an 8 by 11 piece of paper he -- in a spiral book -- he wrote in a pencil Jacque-ing and that's how he did it. Yes, yes.

RG: That's very interesting.

MN: So you have a famous piece of music named after you.

RG: That's right [laughs].

JSB: I always felt humbled by it.

Interviewee: Jacque Smith Bonneau, Session #1
Interviewer: Dr. Mark D. Naison, Robert Gums, and Robin Kelly
Date: 2/5/04

RG: You seem to have been his favorite niece.

JSB: Oh well, he said?

[Laughter]

JSB: Well let's say it's like the sunshine and all the rays, which is your favorite? Okay, so he -- it was enough of him to spread it around.

MN: Is there anything in winding up- because I think we have to let Matt out of here --

JSB: Okay.

MN: --that you'd like to say that you didn't have a chance to say in looking back at this amazing experience of growing up?

JSB: That Thelonius touched so many lives and there are so many musicians that I didn't mention that I'm sure that he's influenced. I'm certain -- and just people in general. They all knew Monk and I'm just so sorry my recall is such that I can't remember this one and that one and the other. But barring that all I can say is that I had a very unique childhood and it's almost unbelievable. You know the kind of people I came in contact with out of that experience. It's such -- from birth almost that I'm in awe of my own life.

MN: Wow. Okay on that note let's end it. Thank you very much. And what I'd like to do is take a picture of Matt with Jacque --

JSB: Sure, yes.

MN: -- and with Robin. And to -- because he's done --

End of Transcription