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## Brath, Elombe

Bronx African American History Project  
*Fordham University*

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Transcriber: Laura Kelly

Mark Naison (MN): This is the 117<sup>th</sup> interview of the Bronx African American History Project. We're at Fordham University on June 21, 2005. We're here with Elombe Brath, a longtime political activist in New York City who is one of the founders of the jazz arts society and very active in organizing some of the first important cultural pageants in New York City in the 1960's. I want to go over a little bit about your childhood in Hunts Point. What are your recollections of life on, was it Kelly Street?

Elombe Brath (EB): Yeah. Kelly, 751 Kelly Street.

MN: Right.

EB: Between Longwood Avenue and I think it was 156<sup>th</sup> street, right where St.

Margaret's Church is.

MN: Right. So how old were you when your family first moved to that block?

EB: Well, I would think that I had to be probably about 11 or 12. Maybe it was even a little earlier because I don't remember if the war had ended, if the Second World War had ended. So my impressions of what was going on around that time, I know about when the congress was set up and Lolita Lebron and the independence movement had shot at the congress. I know when the Rosenberg trial came up. You know, I remember those types because I was going to school then. But I would say it would have to be probably around maybe 11 years old.

MN: Right, now where was your family living before they moved to the Bronx?

EB: Lived in Harlem about 129<sup>th</sup> street which is all changed now because it's a long time now been a project, near Salem Church.

MN: Now was your family living in a private house in Harlem or were they living in an apartment?

EB: No we lived in a apartment building and I can't remember what we lived in in Brooklyn because we also were in Brooklyn.

MN: Right. Now - -

EB: I was born in Brooklyn.

MN: You were born in Brooklyn, then moved to Harlem, then to the Bronx. Now when you were in Harlem, were you in elementary school or junior high school when the family moved?

EB: I think we were in elementary school. We went to junior high school in Harlem at Thomas Nolton which is P.S. 52.

MN: Now how did your family find the Bronx? How did they end up moving there?

EB: I don't know. One thing I could tell you that the owner, the previous owner who was a German, Mr. Jandel, and I don't know where his allegiance lied [laughs].

MN: [laughs]

EB: I think he was one of the people who helped to, what you call, what is it when you try to use black people to come into the community because your gonna - -

MN: Blockbuster

EB: Blockbuster. He was one of the - - he might have been a blockbuster because most of the people in the area there were Irish, or Jewish, or Chinese. And ironically, at the time that we moved in, many other people came from the Carribbean in the 700 blocks,

that's where the more brownstone houses were as opposed of course [inaudible] what people called tenements.

MN: Okay. Now, so most of the families who bought on the 700 block were of Caribbean ancestry?

EB: Yeah, it seemed like most of the people who come in there were - - and apparently it must have been white ownership because most of the tenants at the time, were white.

MN: So you had Caribbean owners of Brownstones, of row houses with white tenants?

EB: Yeah.

MN: Now how fast was the racial turnover on the block? Was it a very quick process of this becoming a mostly black area or pretty gradual?

EB: It seemed to be pretty much gradual because like, we know all the people and then eventually, as they moved out and went further up in the Bronx, the other people who came there were black tenants and eventually the whole area was black. Was mostly black, there was some Latinos, Puerto Ricans. At that time, before the Lita Lebrone incident everything was Spanish-American. Spanish-American barber shop, Spanish-American grocery store, Spanish-American candy store. In other words, there was no sense of being Puerto Rican that much. Although you ask them, they would say they're Puerto Rican. But it was mostly Spanish-American, Spanish hyphen American.

MN: Wow. That's interesting. What was the racial composition at Thomas Nolton? Was it a racially mixed school?

EB: Yeah. Thomas Nolton was racially mixed and that meant there were black students there. There were Latino, Puerto Rican, mostly that. I don't think there were any - - like

the [inaudible] which you have today between Cubans, Columbians, Panamanians and all who make up the mix in New York of being Latin American.

MN: Right. Now, were you the oldest brother?

EB: Yeah.

MN: Now was Thomas Nolton tracked by ability level or test scores or did they have like the one class, the two class - -

EB: Yeah. They had one class, two class, and they went up to what they called the CRMD's which was, what was it now - - remedial reading.

MN: Developmentally deficient.

EB: Children for Remedial Mental - -

MN: Disability or something. Development - -

EB: I was just talking about this recently. But it was the Children for, CRMD, remedial mental development, something like that, which the kids who didn't go there used to call, used the acronym as the crazy room for mad dogs [laughs]. Very cynic, cynically.

MN: Right. Did you have a good experience at Thomas Nolton?

EB: Yeah, I had a good [inaudible].

MN: Now when did you start to develop your artistic talent? Was this something that came out of - -

EB: My father was a tailor by trade, but he also was a gifted painter so we grew up painting with him sometime. We would go up to Sag Harbor when we were in the Bronx. We would go and set up three canvases and he would say paint them [inaudible]. And we would paint on both sides. So we had like three paintings all together. And I of course

always, like most young kids at that time, would draw on paper, like doing comic books and stuff like that. And when you talk about Thomas Nolton, prior to that was P.S. 39.

P.S. 39 was right down Long Avenue between Kelly and I think the next street was - -

[disruption in tape]

MN: Okay, you were saying, P.S. 39.

EB: Yeah, that was the elementary school.

MN: So you went there before you went to Nolton?

EB: Well, yeah because Thomas Nolton was a junior high school. We came out of P.S. 39 and 39, let me see now - - 39, that's probably, Colin Powell went there too [inaudible].

MN: Now did you get art instruction in elementary school or - -

EB: Yeah, at that time that's one of the things they would have, art instruction, and sometimes they would have music. As a matter of fact, later on it developed more. And then later on when they had the cutbacks, one of the things they did was started to cut back the music and art which also uncannily led to rap.

MN: Well, yeah, yeah, I know. Now was there a lot of political discussion in your household?

EB: The person who would be more [inaudible] that actually helped shape my early conscience was my mother. Because she had a first cousin, Clendell Wickham in Barbados that was one of the early socialists and he was a journalist, which actually as I look back, was maybe in the back of my mind all the time so that - -

MN: How do you spell his name, W-I-C-K-H-A-M?

EB: Clendell, C-L-E-N-D-E-L-L.

MN: Clendell.

EB: Wickham, W-I-C-K-H-A-M.

MN: Right.

EB: He was an editor of the Herald newspaper, I think it was in Barbados. And he was an advocate of the poor. I mean later on I saw some other writings that said something about socialists, but my mother always talked about he was an advocate for the poor.

MN: Now did he visit the family?

EB: No, he was in Barbados and as a matter of fact, the experience in Barbados, which I'll send you songs and stuff back on that, the experience in Barbados was that in [inaudible] the poor, he criticized the crown and for that, they came down on him and they brought in Grantley Adams who later on became Sir Grantley Adams. [inaudible] of taking the case for free just to go after Clendell Wickham which forced him to - - he was found guilty and forced into exile where he went into Grenada and became associated with another newspaper man from Grenada, Theockis Albert Maryshow, who when [inaudible] came into power, they made Maryshow one of the heroes of Grenada and history and revolution.

MN: Now did your family - - did you ever, as a child, go back to Barbados to visit relatives?

EB: No, the only time - - the first time I went back to Barbados was when me and my wife got married. We went back there with my mother and also to meet some of my father's family.

MN: Now did your family interact with other people from Barbados in New York City? Did they have a social circle of friends from the island?

EB: Well what happened is that in that particular region or area, you had a lot of people from Barbados and some people from other islands. In St. Margaret's church there were people from Barbados, there were people from Jamaica, like Colin Powell's people were from Jamaica, my people were from Barbados. There were some other people who were probably from Trinidad. But there were also people from the South. It was a polyglot. It was a mixture of really a force of pan-African setting, because people came into these particular areas - - in fact, everybody used to be able to imitate everybody else. You know what I mean? Doing the accents.

MN: Oh, you would imitate each other?

EB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. People would talk, you know, use accents. So somebody, if you didn't hear them consistently, you wouldn't know if they were from the South or from one of the islands.

MN: were there any teachers at Thomas Nolton who made a particularly big impression on you?

EB: Yeah, it Thomas Nolton was Mr. Cichetti. I don't know if he was Italian or if he was Polish, I can't really remember. But he was a history teacher. And the first, I remember the first project I did [inaudible] in that particular class, was on the Maya's from Central America. He got me interested in stuff where he'd talk about history involving other places. Of course at the time there was no big [inaudible] that I was in toward African History but I was always interested in other people. As a matter of fact, one of the things

that was interesting particularly in P.S. 39, was that - - now here's a school that was really mixed because you had all the white people that were there at that particular time as well as the new people coming from, immigration from the islands or from the South, so you had all of them going to the same school. But once a year they would combine a whole show from the American Indians doing the [inaudible] dances. I mean we used to wait for it every year, the hoop dance, the war dance - -

MN: Wow!

[phone rings]

EB: - - they were doing all these things up at P.S. 39. There was a young girl there, who was a student. She was Irish but her name was Joan Hudson.

[phone rings]

[pause in tape]

EB: I was talking about Joan Hudson. Irish girl, but every year when they had the cultural show, she would put on her green and she would do her dance.

MN; Oh that Irish - -

EB: With the [inaudible], the blouse, and the skirt.

MN: Wow.

EB: And still standing up straight just dancing from the knees down. And everybody loved it. I mean it was a fact that everybody, all the people, whatever their particular ethnic group or background, they just accepted it, you know and that's one of the few people from the school that could do something that represented their particular culture. At that time there was two sisters there who would do a dance every year. It was a what

do you call, a pseudo-African dance. But it was basically - - they wouldn't say that. It was called interpretive dancing. In fact you were not - - before people were talking - - unless you were dealing with Catherine Dunham or Pearl Pevis and you came through that particular thing. But this all they would say was interpretive dancing so you would do your own interpretation. And so that was something that black people were actually doing as opposed to the other people who were there.

MN: Somebody - -

Unknown: Sorry I'm a little late.

MN: come join us.

[pause in interview]

Maxine Gordon (MG): We're on Kelly Street.

MN: So we're talking on Kelly Street, P.S. 39 - -

EB: That's also where Eddie Palmeri came out of, Charlie Palmeri's older brother. All of, we all in the same class.

MN: Oh so they were in the same group as you in school?

EB: Oh yeah, all in the same group - -

MG: Could you state your birth date?

EB: September 30, 1936.

MN: Right. So you were going to 39 and 52 with Charlie and Eddie Palmeri.

EB: Yeah. When mambo first started up, not so much as far as they got to some of the young people who would take it up as a way of life. There was Jose Chiano. There was

another, what's his name, I can't even remember. We'll come back to him. We call these senior moments.

MG: Uh huh [laughs].

EB: I call it, what do we call it now, oh, Jeopardy-idity.

MG: [laughs]

EB: Because you know on Jeopardy when you're trying to remember something and then the bell rings but then 10 minutes later you say, "I got it!"

[laughter]

[crosstalk]

MN: What were the, you know, so, on Kelly Street, what was the music that was coming out of people's apartments and houses?

EB: Well you know, like for instance, like when - - at that time when, say, like a Dr. Jive, Tommy Smalls who had a [inaudible] in Harlem was named for him.

MN: Really?

EB: Yeah. And he had a music show that was very interesting. I can't remember if it was on RL or LIB, earlier LIB. Early LIB was like black music throughout the day until five o'clock. Then it turned Polish.

MG: [laughs]

MN: [laughs] Right.

EB: When, I forget his named who owned it - -

MN: Right. Now what time was Dr. Jive on?

EB: Dr. Jive would come on...he was probably after school time. But he would have like say, maybe a half and hour of rhythm and blues, half an hour of Calypso, half an hour of Latino. So we came up as ghetto ethnologists.

[laughter]

MN: That's a great quote, "We came up as ghetto..." Write that down.

EB: Ghetto musicologists.

MN: Musicologists.

EB: Yeah, yeah. So we listened to all of it.

MN: And what about in your home? What kinds of things did your parents like most?

EB: Well, you know, my parents I don't think we're really interested that much in pop music. But what you got was the music that was put out there for everybody. So you would be tuned into Ed Sullivan when he came on. Because even Ed Sullivan came on and it was a what do you call it, vaudeville show type [inaudible]. But you always knew you might see Billie Holiday, you might see Sarah Vaughn, you might see Ella, you know? Later on, Carmen and [inaudible] - -

MG: Nat Cole.

EB: - - yeah, and Nat Cole. And so you would see them in between Sophie Tucker and all the rest of them.

MN: Yeah, or Kate Smith.

EB: Yeah, yeah. So whatever was coming up, you would just see it as - - they'd say this is the best stuff, and you're looking at it you know? And you had no other choice. You didn't have that many varieties at the time.

MN: Right, now when did you become interested in jazz as part of this whole mix of musical forms you were exposed to?

EB: Well, I remember first like when we used to go to P.S. 52, at nighttime, in the evening, extra curricular activities time. And they were playing all this music and the first thing I heard - -

MN: This was in the after-school center?

EB: Yeah. Yeah the after-school - -

MN: Was it a nice center?

EB: Yeah, it was a nice center. It was really - - the school, you know, the downstairs of the school. The first thing that really got to me was listening this one time they played [inaudible] with Charlie Parker and Miles Davis and the other side was Star Eyes.

MG: What year?

EB: It might have been in - -

MG: Like '48 or '50?

EB: Yeah, I think it was probably in either the late '40's or - - no it had to be in the '50's.

MN: Now this - - so this is, were you in junior high then or high school?

EB: Well junior high school, let me see - -

[disruption in tape]

MN: So we're going back to Kelly Street. What did you wanna ask Maxine?

MG: I wanna ask about Kelly Street.

EB: Okay.

MG: About these two parts of Kelly Street.

[disruption in tape]

MN: Testing, testing.

[disruption in tape]

EB: - - which in the white schools they'd be doing the Lindy. Although you did have as many, you had whole black shows dealing with the Lindy. In fact, there used to be over in Smalls, she's gone now, but she started to revive the show later on in the '60's.

MN: So they used to have like in the evening center, kids would be dancing together?

EB: Yeah.

MN: Boys and girls?

EB: Yeah. So you would have that. And of course you listen to a lot of rhythm and blues. And in fact, the magazine, rhythm and blues came out at that time. There was a magazine that was called rhythm and blues.

MN: Really?

EB: This is before Allan Freed came. When Allan Freed came along, he started to play some of the music on the white stations. And what he did, he took up the name of Moondog, but Moondog was a guy, a bohemian that used to be on 52<sup>nd</sup> - -

MG: 52<sup>nd</sup>, yeah, I remember Moondog.

EB: - - and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, yeah. With his [inaudible]. And so Moondog sued him for using the name Moondog. So then he came back and took out [inaudible]. And they took out the chorus, "I wanna rock, I wanna roll."

[disruption in tape]

[END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A]

[TAPE 1 SIDE B EMPTY]

[BEGINNING OF TAPE 2 SIDE A]

MN: Okay so, Elombe, Kelly Street sounds like it was an absolutely amazing place to grow up in terms of different cultures and traditions coming together.

EB: Well it was interesting as the community changed. As more and more black people started to come in, white people started to go further up - -

[laughter]

EB: - - [laughs] out of the community and you had some early white flight, you know? And then of course, the uhhh - - there was a change between blacks and Latinos, more Latinos coming in, more Puerto Ricans. And even to the point where there was a major gang fight. I forget what year that was between the Rockets and the Seven Crowns, the Seven Crowns being the black group and the Rockets being the Puerto Rican group. And the 156<sup>th</sup> street being the dividing line. It was stupid too. It started off as stupid stuff. And there wasn't a whole lot of people getting - - it wasn't the thing where the people went into the wrong thing because you had to go to the same school anyway [laughs].

MN: So was this when you were in junior high or in high school when this gang fight took place?

EB: I think it was when we were in, we were in junior high school because it was at Thomas Nolton where - - like we were east of Thomas Nolton, it was more Latino, and of course west of Thomas Nolton it was more black. So it was black and Latino.

MN: Did any of those conflicts play themselves out in the school? Were there fights in the school?

EB: There was one time when somebody got stabbed because one of the groups came over. There was another time there was retaliation. [inaudible]

MN: did anybody ever try to recruit you into a gang?

EB: Oh yeah, yeah. Some people in the Seven Crowns - - it was like, you know, the attitude thing was different. One guy was trying to be really a [inaudible] you know. He's gonna try and get you to, you gotta go do this, you gotta go do that, and he didn't like the way we responded so we didn't get involved with him. But I always thought that gang fights, particularly when you have ethnic- groups like that- is a waste of time. And also, it leads to negative stuff because you're caught in a situation where there's an overlay that conducts social conditions so that people react and respond to certain stimuli that's negative because it becomes very competitive. So what happened is that as you started to do that, then the civil, then the thing was going on in the South. Don't forget, when we started, like I said before, when Bird died in - -

MG: In '55.

EB: - - yeah '55 and Emit Till the same year. Emit Till the same year, Rosa Parks. Then when Brownie killed Richie, Richie Powell, in the car, that's when we formed [inaudible] to say that we want our people to understand that first of all, we were more interested in how the music was starting to be dissipated as far as blacks were concerned. At that time, we had [inaudible]. There were musicians we called the naturalists, you

know, like Lou Donaldson, George Tucker, the bass player, Gigi Grice. All those people were people we worked with. Gigi was - -

MG: Randy.

EB: - - huh? Randy. You know what I mean? And then there were other people who just, like Sonny Red, I remember him always like, "It's the dollar man, it's the green." You know what I'm saying, it's more than the green, you got to talk about control. This is our music. This is music that our people did. This came out of a struggle. This came out of people dying and it was shaped by the racism that helped to actually form the social conditions that brought forth the music. So you just can't say it. At the same time, you had what Dizzy and them was doing, there was the stuff even before that with Chano Pozo. So there was a bridge coming in with Mario Pozo. I would see on almost a daily basis Ray Baretto walking through the community with Arsenio - -

MG: Rodriguez.

EB: - - Arsenio Rodriguez. The blind black Cuban.

MN: They were in your neighborhood?

EB: Yeah, I mean all of these people were right there. And so, there were some things that - - we started to see that there was a music thing. And the music became big. People were dancing mambo. And then cha cha and the meringue thing coming up from the Dominican Republic. But the point is that you always see people who were in the same social conditions, you know? And people trying to manipulate them who would be against each other.

MN: Now when did you become politically conscious? Is this something that you were as a child or is this something that came to you as you were older?

Brian Purnell (BP): I'm sorry, could you speak up a little bit please?

EB: [inaudible]

[laughter]

BP: That's you on the bottom there.

EB: Okay.

MG: You think it's the mic?

BP: Yeah, you need to move the mic up a little bit?

[crosstalk]

EB: what I usually do, because I used to work with TV and I was an aid of [inaudible].

[interruption in tape]

MN: When do you date sort of the dawning of the political consciousness?

EB: Well I told you before was my mother telling me about Clendell Wickham, our first cousin, and seeing the politics there and then starting to pick up these little things that are now allowing for you to [inaudible] in your own particular time period. For instance, I was - - I told you about Mr. Cichetti?

MN: Uh huh.

EB: And I told you about the kind of cultural conditions where people came by, American Indians came by. So I'm seeing all of this stuff and I'm fusing all of this into a larger picture. So I used to listen on the radio besides listening to Dr. Jive, I would listen to spoken word. I would listen to UN radio. And I'm reading. I've always been a militant

reader. And I then started to see all these things that are political. And I'm reading books. I'm also going to movies. And you know, like say in the 1950's like just before [inaudible] right? 1954. I'm going - - oh I tell you what, at '48. This is where I think the trigger was. There was a brother called, his name was, his Christian name was Leslie Scott. He became a Muslim. He was the uncle to one of my friends [inaudible]. He took the name Zacariah Abdullah and he was a fantastic baritone. He could sing his ass off you know? And he tried to get on the Ed Sullivan show. Not the Ed Sullivan show, Arthur Godfried. Tried to get on Arthur Godfried's show. And as Zacariah Abdullah, it wasn't happening. It was 1948. This is when the war in the Middle East is starting right? So he reapplied under the name of Leslie Scott. He didn't win, although he was the best. He came in second. But the people heard him and they offered him the role of Porgy in Porgy and Bess. So he toured all over. But one of the things he did before that, he had pulled all of the kids together on Kelly [inaudible]. We were about 12 years old. So in his case, it was about 1948, so it actually [inaudible]. So he put us into a thing called the Shabazz, it was called. And he was a Muslim and he started to tell us about the situation with the Muslims and the struggles and go on and on, and Palestine. So we used to go to the movies, and when we'd go to the movies, we would actually look at the newsreels because, you know, television hadn't really debuted in the way it would later on. So when you went to a movie you would have paphe news, P-A-P-H-E news was the thing - -

MG: Yeah.

EB: You remember that?

MG: I remember that.

EB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So what happens is that [inaudible] when that was going on I remember - - in between the two movies they'd give you the news, right? And they said there's a globe master that would come and said "French troops sent as reinforcements to China." And the globe master opens up the door and all these black soldiers come out. Now I'm trying to figure out, French troops, who are these French troops? Now you're starting to see the colonialism that these troops they're sending as reinforcements to people who are of the French colonies to fight their enemies. And I'm saying, oh look at that! How did this happen? These ain't French people. These are - - so you're staring to put that together now, you know? So between having situations like is one with Zacariah Abdullah who toured all around the world. And I guess, even though he did many of the shows that during that particular time where he played Porgy, when they went to make the movie and they wanted to do this thing on Porgy and Bess, he was one of the only singers that could really sing that thing. And because he wasn't a big man they gave it to Sydney Poitier and put somebody to sing for him. But he sang Jake the Fisherman. He sang and played Jake the Fisherman.

MG: Oh yeah?

EB: Yeah. So you're starting to see all this kind of business arrangements because of the name, and all these things you're starting to put together. Check this out man, Zacariah should have been singing, he should have had the lead role all around the world so they'd know it. But they do it like the same thing they did with Stephanie Mills with The Wiz. You know, when they give it to Diana Ross and Stephanie Mills could even more play it because she was smaller and she was younger. But they do that. So you're starting to see

the commercialization and how you find the corruption - - the actual art because - - or the politics because you want the person that you want to be the one to let them do it. And so that did a lot to actually sharpen my mind to the point where I would go down the Translux theatre where all they did was show newsreels. I'd go down there by myself and sit in there and watch the news reels because it gave me the opportunity to see the world how it is. Even though at that particular time you have to say that it was probably still something that was based on bias. Because there wasn't so much liberal - - it's just that you had a chance to see and then you can make your own analysis.

MN: So this is when you're in junior high or in high school that you start doing this?

EB: Yeah, yeah, yeah because we talk about when we get to [inaudible], you're talking in the '50's. You're still on '54. Let me just [inaudible] about the socialization of other people. This is a little funny thing. There was a guy, he was a friend, we all - - like I said, the school was all integrated. He was a French guy named LeCramp. And LeCramp, he wasn't what you would call racist, but he was the kind of guy that if we were watching [inaudible] we would say he was a racist, you know? Because he made jokes about - - there was one student who was an Eskimo and he's coming through the class and when LeCramp would see him he would holler out "Nanook of the north." Because there was a geography book, there was a kid in there - - and everybody started laughing at the guy you know? A couple of days later, here comes a Chinese guy, Fong. And he saw Fong come in and he hollers out, "J-A-P, Jap." And everybody started laughing and Fong was all flustered. Two days later man, [inaudible] happened and we said oh shit. Everybody said we gotta get up to the room when - - Fong's got to come, we got a show today. And

so Fong - - you know, LeCramp was in the room. And Fong came upstairs. Everybody was crowded, "Hey Fong! How you doing Fong?" He went in there and he was like, "LeCramp! Surrender or die."

MG: [laughs]

MN: [laughs]

EB: The whole place fell out man. LeCramp got red [laughs]. People were waiting - - but even though it was all this, it was racism all up in there, it was done - - I mean, nobody had a fight because it was almost like snapping. But that was one time when LeCramp wish he had never said that because he was the one embarrassed.

Unknown: [inaudible]

EB: Yeah. And what was deep too was that people didn't say that Fong was Vietnamese. They understood that generally speaking that he was - -

MG: Yeah, right.

EB: - - just like LeCramp attacked him. So he comes back, and he didn't say he was, but he also knew we were talking about Indochina. So therefore - - and the people in the class, in the school, they had been so primed for this that they said we got to be there. Everybody who saw, who heard the thing, who saw it in the newspaper and they had a picture of [inaudible] was surrounded, everybody had the same thing on mind that we gotta get to the homeroom because when LeCramp comes in there or Fong, someone's gonna snap.

MN: [laughs] Now in your neighborhood, you mentioned there was Mr. Abdullah, who was - -

EB: Zacariah Abdullah, yeah.

MN: - - yeah, was a Muslim. Were there any people who were open socialists in the community, who, you know, like your uncle in Barbados. Were there any people in the neighborhood, were there teachers, were there other people who - -

EB: You know, I don't know. Most of the people in that particular time on Kelly Street, white people were Jewish. And they were more liberal. However, when it came down to question of the Middle East, that was a different thing all together. They were deep down in Zionism. So in fact, I think later on that was a major thing that actually broke the so called black and Jewish coalition over the thing that [inaudible] in Israel and what was really happening and people taking positions even when Israel was siding with South Africa. So, and that's still the thing. I mean, that's still the thing that really starts [inaudible] particularly when people who are in the civil rights movement now have become overwhelmed by the black nationalists who have been out there all the time who have sharper positions on that. So based on the [inaudible] stuff and when they tried to speak for themselves in the civil rights movement, a lot of people broke away because they were gonna tell you, you couldn't say that, you can't say that. So they left. They went and became more nationalist oriented.

MN: Right. Now how did you end up going to school in industrial arts?

EB: Okay. You know, when we were in P.S. 39 both and in P.S., junior high school 52, the guidance counselors would try to ship you off to Morris or wherever they want you to go because somebody said they were getting paid by people who were in those schools. And you know, schools of people who were talented, they didn't really want them to go

there, they wanted them to go through the regular system, you know? You know, you gotta remember that in those days, after drugs were coming through the community, there became a situation where if you'd say, what happened to so and so, he's upstate, you didn't think he was going to SUNY. He wasn't going to SUNY.

MG: [laughs]

EB: He was not going to state University of New York.

MN: Right.

EB: [laughs] He's in the joint, you know? And so, the steering of people away from things that might heighten their ambition - -

MN: So Morris was considered a, you know, a mediocre school in those days?

EB: It was a regular school. But you see, it was a general school.

MN: Right.

EB: When you start going to art school or music and art or performing arts and stuff like that, these are things you want, a child has ideas of what they wanted to be, of what they wanted to do, and then somebody comes and then reroutes them right away.

[inaudible] into what you thought you would be able to exploit your talents into mediocrity. You know, something that is not what you want to do. You can't even - - I don't even know what this curriculum here that I even want to be involved in. I don't even need to be here. [inaudible] So you got all that kind of stuff happening. So the idea is that I had always been doing art, you know? I'm always drawing and stuff like that so I actually, not only did I do my own portfolio to be able to try to show before the people at the School of Industrial Art, I also helped two friends with their portfolios.

MN: right.

EB: So we all went - -

MN: You all went down and you all got - - you had an audition in effect by showing your portfolio?

EB: Yeah, portfolios, you gotta show what it is, how you do artwork and so. And there was judges.

MN: Now when did drugs hit Kelly Street?

EB: Drugs came in really in the, really the '50's. Post WWII because there was - -

Unknown: [inaudible]

EB: - - yeah, yeah. Even when we were doing a jazz concert. When we were doing a jazz concert, brothers who we knew - - I remember one brother, I don't want to call his name, but I would give him, I said look, we got a Philly Joe Jones coming up on Sunday here, here's a [inaudible], you come up, I'll get you in, you know? "Oh man, he ain't gonna show!" He'd go around bad-mouthing instead of like somebody well saying, well look, you know what drugs is doing to the jazz community but at the same time, these people want to play, and they want to see this. We'd be standing in front of the club, by 845 there and here comes Monk. Monk is walking out with Benny Harris you know? Striding on down because somebody told some young guys up there, some kids up there, doing something on jazz, you know [inaudible]? So Monk comes down to check it. Him and Benny Harris. Benny Harris is not even playing anymore. And they come down there and, this is something I told Maxine before, Monk liked what he saw, you know? He didn't play, but he came down there and just him standing in front of the club and going

in and out was helpful, you know? And one time he came down and I was there and he says to me, he says, "Come." So Monk said come, I walk over to Monk you know?

MN: [laughs]

EB: He went over to the corner and said, "Come." He went around the corner again and went to the side of the wall and said, "Come." I went over there. He put his hand to his ear and said, "Do this." I listened and I could hear the music coming out. It wasn't a band, maybe it was somebody playing the juke box. And Monk said, "That's good," And walked away.

[laughter]

EB: Yeah, he say, "That's good."

[crosstalk]

EB: You could hear that something's happening, music is happening.

MG: Could you go back to this thing about Sissy Kelly and Banana Kelly.

EB: Oh yeah that was one thing that the kids who all lived, which was much more people who lived in the tenements, so since there was all - - some people had parents who had houses, like I said, they made a class distinction, you know - -

MN: So where Colin Powell lived, he lived on the tenement block?

EB: Yeah.

MN: Him and Gene Norman?

EB: Yeah, but it's interesting because Colin Powell - -

Unknown: Who's Gene Norman?

MN: Landmark commissioner.

Unknown: Oh!

EB: - - Colin Powell was a person who was not like a tough guy either. He just happened to live there in that area, but he lived further over than most other people who - - he lived in 954, I lived in 751.

MN: right.

EB: But Colin Powell was the guy who the acolyte where every Sunday he would come down there with the cross walking down. And I'm looking [inaudible].

[laughter]

EB: And of course by that time I become very suspicious of the church because I couldn't see them really - -

Unknown: Now what church was an Acolyte?

MN: St. Margaret's.

EB: St. Margaret's Church. It's right on, it's still there.

Unknown: So it's a Catholic Church?

MN: No. Episcopal.

EB: No, Episcopal. Episcopal was the closest, the Episcopal church is the closest thing to the Catholic Church.

Unknown: I know. I'm aware of that.

EB: Yeah. And Colin was very interested in [inaudible]. He had some very - - you had - - at that time, in the black community you had a kind of, people who you called had a color [inaudible]. And Colin Powell was one of those kind of guys. Even today, if you check his stuff - - that's why I guess went he went to Morris and saw the people in the

military uniform and saw the girls how they looked. So he went into that was because he was that gung ho then. But then when he got into it.

Unknown: [inaudible]

EB: Yeah, yeah.

Unknown: It wasn't unusual, I had friends like that.

EB: Yeah, yeah, no, no. But I'm saying that I tracked him longer than anybody else because most people had [inaudible] that when you start talking about international affairs and you start talking about Colin Powell that Elombe's the one that got the book on that one because I saw him longer than anybody and I predicted that this guy - -

MN: now - -

EB: And whatever they're promoting him about is things that I'm against anyway. He fought in Vietnam, he fought in Korea. [inaudible] is that's the places they allow him to fight. Whereas people like Carlos Cooks, who was a Dominican who was actually the person most responsible if Malcolm wasn't here, because I knew Malcolm very well. I knew him from about 19 - -

MN: right, now Carlos Cooks was from the Dominican Republic?

EB: Yeah.

MN: I didn't realize that.

EB: Yeah, yeah. Carlos Cook is from the Dominican Republic. Who left when [inaudible] came to power as a child with his father. But he's the one that Black Nationalism, when you talk about who took Marcus Garvey's name out of the gutter, and reestablished it with the red, black, and green flags, red, black, and green colors, with the

natural hair. I mean all the things that people out here go by black, all these kinds of concepts, all of them were reconstituted by Carlos Cooks, almost single-handedly.

MN: In the late '40's, were you aware of club 845 when you were living on Kelly street? Like, when did - -

EB: Oh yeah, because when you had to go to school, when you come up to go to Prospect Avenue to go down to the train, the first thing you would see there is Prospect Avenue, you see right there 845 and in the corner right here is a subway that takes you downtown.

MN: Right.

EB: I remember when we started to do concerts and Betty Carter had just come home. And Miles introduced me to her down at Birdland and I asked her to come up there and start to do some - - this was before she was getting ready to make her big change, you know. She'd come out with the Betty, Betty [inaudible]. So she was living in Jersey at that time. And I remember when she would always come, you'd see her when she was getting ready to come down the stairs. And she just walked right there into the club. So you always were aware of Club 845 - -

MN: Yeah. Even as a kid.

EB: Yeah, as a kid, yeah. Because it was a big thing. The first big thing you saw when you got to Prospect Avenue. That's where it was, Prospect Avenue and Westchester - -

MN: Were the people who went to the club like better dressed than, you know, was it a place you went in with a high-style appearance?

EB: Uh, okay. When we came to our things, you know, on a Sunday, people came dressed. Because you gotta remember that, up until recently with rap, black people were dressed. You know they didn't go nowhere - -

[laughs]

EB: - - it changed with rap and those cartoon figures of Bill Cosby. But they talk about those are some raggedy-ass people too you know?

[laughter]

EB: But the thing is, now rap had changed because a lot of people are now trying to diversify into selling clothes. So you have Puffy and all those guys looking more conscious. But you know, black people would never be caught not having their Sunday clothes.

Unknown: [inaudible]

EB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Even if you had one suit.

MN: right. What about the Hunt's Point Palace, was that something that, did you go to that when you - -

EB: Yeah, we went to the Hunt's Point Palace for dances. I remember one time we had up there, we saw, Art Max when he had those drum ladles. But the thing we did, the big thing up there was when two years after Bird we did a thing about Bird, in "Bird Lives." And we had Gigi Glice, Jackie McClean, Lou Danaldson, and Cannonball.

MG: The alto madness right?

EB: Yeah, the alto madness, yeah.

MN: wow. At Hunt's Point Palace?

EB: Yeah, that was a hell of a show.

MN: Are there any flyers of that around?

EB: There's some there and there's also some in a book. Somebody showed a - - in fact, when we were doing something a couple of years ago for Gigi, [inaudible] - -

Unknown: [inaudible]

[crosstalk]

MN: Daniel White works for him, one of our former students.

Unknown: You see some of the flyers, 1955 - -

MG: Oh good.

MN: Yeah.

EB: We had, we were doing things with - - that was '57, the one I just talked to you about, you know? The one with Cannonball, Gigi, Lou Donaldson, and Jackie McClean, Jackie McClean. But there were many other - -

MG: What about at the International Inn, what did you do up there?

EB: International Inn, we had, let me see, that's the Odd Farmer - - I gotta find that poster.

Unknown: [inaudible]

EB: Yeah, oh - -

MN: Now Donald Bird lived in the Bronx.

Unknown: [inaudible]

EB: No we had Doanld Bird - -

MG: [inaudible] when Herbie Hancock and he were roommates, or later?

Unknown: [inaudible]

EB: Well we had - - there was - - that's when you had later on when Nancy Wilson was at Blue Morocco - -

MG: Oh yes.

EB: - - and Irene Reed was over at Freddie's.

Everyone: Yeah, yeah.

EB: Yeah, yeah. And even before that, early on, before any of these clubs there was a thing called Kumasi [inaudible]. Which is, Kumasi is where the [inaudible] or the live in of Ghana. And the Kumasi was right there on Boston Road. Over there on Boston Road and another street. It was a little downstairs place. This guy Julius - -

Unknown: Was that off 166<sup>th</sup> Street?

EB: Yeah just before you get ready to go to Crotona Avenue.

Unknown: Oh yeah, yeah!

EB: Just before you go to Crotona Park.

MN: How do you spell Kumasi?

EB: K-U-M-A-S-I.

MN: K-U-M-A-S-I?

EB: Yeah, K-U-M-A-S-I. And Durbar, Durbar is like a festival is the Ghanian language,

D-U-R-B-A-R. Yeah, Durbar.

MN: Now did you know about the International Inn Arch? The place up in, that they organized this - -

Arch: Where?

MN: Up on White Plains Road?

EB: And 225<sup>th</sup> Street.

Arch: No, no.

MG: What year was that?

EB: Umm, I remember '59.

MN: How did you find the place?

EB: We were looking for a place, an outdoor place - -

MN: Oh, outdoors?

EB: Yeah an outdoor place. Yeah, yeah. We did several things over there.

MN: Now what made you organize the Jazz Arts Society to begin with? What gave you the idea?

EB: Because we were concerned about the musicians getting ripped off and we wanted to try to pull something together that would bring jazz, which I say you know, is America's greatest music - - when we heard that, we started seeing who was making the money and who was getting the - -

Unknown: [inaudible]

EB: Yeah, yeah. We started to say look, we have to put all these African culture things, dance, and all this stuff. Things they're doing now when people talking about like world music, you know, there's more things now coming out of Africa, particularly Africa and Cuba. I mean there's stuff going on there now, music-wise, that is hard to beat. You remember before like when you were coming up and the biggest thing that was a foreign group was the Sweedish All-stars?

MG: [laughs]

EB: that was funny. Everybody thought that was so deep. Then it came the Australian Jazz Quartet.

[laughter]

MG: Right.

EB: But the stuff that's coming out, even like when Dizzy and them started the thing with Chano Pozo [inaudible], that's why everybody's going down there. Dizzy was even going down there. They're playing - - that's why the guys come, even though politically I don't agree with them like Tito Rivera and stuff like that, but the music, yeah, the music. And Chuchu Valdez, you know what I mean?

MG: Oh yeah, but Chuchu Valdez is not anti-[inaudible].

EB: No, no. I'm saying he's one of the people - -

MG: [inaudible]

EB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. He goes back and forth. He lived there yeah. He had no contradiction.

MG: And the father's great too.

EB: Yeah. And then there was like of course, Mario Pozo. And then you had something else. And I said before, the music was melding together right, black and Latino. Then they got - - and that's when Dizzy, that's when Tito Puente had Willie Boble and Mongul. And it was a big gig they were gonna do in Florida and they got to Tito and told him that they wanted to play the gig but you know how Florida is. So they told Mongul and Willie Boble some crap why they couldn't go.

MN: This is in the '50's?

EB: Yeah.

MG: Oh because they thought it was an integrated band and they thought Tito Puente was white [laughs]?

EB: This is what Machito said when we were talking about it, you know?

MG: Oh, uh huh.

EB: They told him that he could get passed.

MG: Oh [inaudible].

EB: And that's when Caljeda picked up Mongul, Willie Barbaroso, Willie Boble - -

MG: Yeah, right.

EB: - - and [inaudible] Potato. And Willie worked to his death hating - -

MN: Tito Puente?

EB: Yeah, for that.

MG: Is that what that was about?

EB: Oh yeah. And then Mongul used to talk to us all the time. Because our office is 125<sup>th</sup> street, he used to come by there. You know people would come by, [inaudible] would come by before he started putting his band. Because all these young guys man and all this music and stuff, they'd come by and talk to us you know? And so I remember when I'd mentioned that when Tito died. I loved Tito's music and stuff like that but there's something I don't like about what he did. When I raised it people shocked, they never heard of that stuff - -

MG: Yeah!

MN: So he was willing to play in the segregated audience?

EB: Yeah, yeah.

MN: In the '50's?

EB: Uhhh...

MN: Or was this later?

EB: You have to just look and see where Caljeda. Yeah, see Caljeda.

MN: So Caljeda picked up the black musicians that were Tito's?

EB: Yeah yeah!

MN: That cracks me up.

EB: He said the hell with that, I've got these guys.

[crosstalk]

EB: He came out of California but he knew what was happening over here. When he heard about that he said, yeah I got them.

[crosstalk]

EB: But the thing about most people see - - now let me tell you this, now at that time you also had Stan Kitten trying to make it as if white people was the baddest thing - - he gonna play Machito, he gonna play Machito's music.

[crosstalk]

EB: Yeah, yeah, and he gonna make it better. White man right? Coming out of California. And then he had - -

[crosstalk]

EB: No but he was making a statement. He was making a statement that this was white -  
- people were trying to make a statement, yeah well they started it but this is all - -

MG: [inaudible]

EB: This is an American art form, anybody can play it, and that shit.

[laughter]

EB: and then you had [inaudible]. I remember in downbeat you know, because Miles - -  
remember he used to have a thing called the blindfold test?

MG: Mmm hmmm.

EB: Where you had to sit over there and you couldn't - - he would play something for  
you and you had to [inaudible]. So you had to then listen so you could tell who was  
playing and stuff like that. So when Miles would do it, he said something about it was  
Dave [inaudible] but he can't swing, or something like that. So Dave [inaudible] comes  
back the next time and says people are now trying to denounce me as not being able to  
play because I'm not a negro.

[laughter]

MG: That was because he didn't swing [laughs].

EB: You had another thing - - you see, a lot of those things, people forget. I don't forget  
that stuff.

MG: Uh huh, no.

EB: Art Blakey was playing, I think it was at Birdland right? He was playing opposite  
Buddy Rich. Art Blakey had contacted the ambassador from Ghana, [inaudible], who also  
played drums, African drums. So Art Blakey hooked up this thing that he was going to

have a feature that the Ambassador that night. And apparently Buddy Rich heard that and figured that's something he should be doing for whatever reason. And he made a big thing that he wanted to do that. Art said, no this is my thing I'm doing, you know? So before when they're switching, Buddy Rich said, it was in the paper, started saying some stuff about cooking and pots. You know, he started making some insulting remarks. He was talking about like - -

MG: About cannibalism.

EB: - - cannibalism, yeah, he was talking - - he was not making some - - and him and Art almost had a fight over that shit. So I'm saying, there's all this kind of stuff people make believe that - - I mean, and when you see the [inaudible]. I mean those things about when he came back in the business, all those things were very telling. But some people got mad when they saw that. Just to come back, he forgets why he went away in the first place.

MG: Right, exactly.

EB: So, people were playing all kind of games. I can't get to this, I can't do this - - why? We can't do this, you know? Because they don't want anybody who might be thinking too much. They don't want them to spoil the rest of the folks. You see what I'm saying? So when you start to - - you know, I'm doing my own thing you know, memoir, and all that stuff is gonna be in there. People are gonna run for cover and get mad and stuff like that.

MG: [laughs]

EB: I say, no, we gotta talk about it. Because it ain't something I imagined. I ran into people that I didn't know that knew about it too, you know?

Unknown: [inaudible]

[crosstalk]

EB: You know what I was looking at just now today?

Unknown: What's that?

EB: Down by where Gill Noble - -

Unknown: [inaudible]

EB: Yeah, because him and Jackie grew up together.

MG: Uh huh, right.

EB: Jackie was a little bit older I think than Gil. But I was down there because we had just did something on [inaudible]. I worked with them for 17 years, consulting in African affairs and graphic artists.

[crosstalk]

EB: Yeah, yeah. And I was at ABC for 37 years. From 1962-1999 before I retired. But when "Like it is" came on, I gravitated right there because I knew Gil, I had met him before. He came to ABC or WABC [inaudible]. And he came here 6 years before I did but we always - - but the music. Gil loved the music. So that same thing he's talking about with everybody there, he would say, remember this? And he's showing me everybody.

[crosstalk]

EB: I remember somebody, a brother who was from Jamaica, and he was a fiend for jazz. I mean, he used to tutor me you know? And he said one time at Charlie Ventura went to - -

Unknown: [inaudible]

EB: Yeah, with his brother. And they went to the brother and Charlie Ventura took his pants down and shitted on the floor.

[laughter]

Unknown: [inaudible]

[crosstalk]

[END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A] [BEGINNING OF TAPE 2 SIDE B]

[crosstalk]

Unknown: When I came to the Bronx in about '58, I used to be looking for the latest in hit music like jazz and stuff like that. Now 845 was there long before I came. I used to go there but the trend had changed and it moved over to like - -

EB: Boston Road.

Unknown: - - Salt and Pepper, Pepper and Salt over there on Jerome Avenue and 168<sup>th</sup> Street now. Here's where - -

MN: Where? The Salt and Pepper?

Unknown: Yeah, Pepper and Salt between Jerome and - - just off Jerome on 167<sup>th</sup> down the hill - -

EB: You got another place now.

MN: Damn, and this is in the late '50's?

Unknown: Yeah, this is the late '50's and '70's also. But here's the thing about that.

Now the people that came out of there - - we used to go like - - I would be playing

[inaudible] flute. And we used to go and jam there. I'm gonna tell you the people that came outta there that became famous. Cassandra Wilson - -

EB: Okay.

Unknown: Okay - -

EB: Because she just got here.

Unknown: Kenny Joe. But you also had - -

EB: Yeah, Kenny Joe, yea.

Unknown: They - - Torre, Steve Torre - -

MG: Oh yeah.

EB: Yeah.

Unknown: And Pablo Valdez, a trombone player.

EB: This is a little after Tino Brooks - -

Unknown: This is one of the last [inaudible] before the crack came in and this is goin on like from '77- '84.

MN: That was a really top jazz spot? Called the Pepper and Salt Lounge?

Unknown: Ask [inaudible]. He used to come in there, it was a beautiful thing, like a Sunday afternoon. And a lot of people - - with his trumpet, do a lot of jazz. Rodney Jones who played the [inaudible] horn, guitar player, he's from over there.

EB: At that time where was Tino - -

[crosstalk]

Unknown: Tino Brooks had passed. Tino Brooks had passed.

EB: But uh, - -

MN: Oliver Beener?

EB: - - Oliver Beener was still alive.

Unknown: Yeah, I guess so. But I didn't ever hear him over there, I didn't ever hear him

- -

MN: This is - -

Unknown: Tino Brooks did the thing with Jimmy Smith. They used to come through at the run, Jimmy used to come through at the run.

MG: Yeah.

Unknown: Freddy Jewel's brother, Kenny Jewel. Then he wound up going to Europe.

MG: Kenny lived in Europe.

Unknown: Copenhagen I believe.

MN: So this is the late '70's, this was its heyday. So this is even in the hip hop years?

EB: Jimmy Castor years too.

Unknown: Just before the hip hop years.

EB: Jimmy Castor - -

MN: Now somebody told me, Bertha Hope told me that Jimmy Castor was in the house band at Sylvia's. At Sylvia's Blue Morocco, Bertha Hope said that when she was in the house band that Jimmy Castor was playing there.

[crosstalk]

MG: Tell them about the African Jazz Arts Society when you went down on 125<sup>th</sup> Street.

EB: Yeah, what we did is when we uh - - first it was just a jazz arts society.

MN: Okay

EB: But later on when we went to 125<sup>th</sup> Street, particularly when we started to get involved in the nationalism, I said it, African Jazz Society. And then they saw someone say, jazz, what are you all, I thought you all were African jazz arts society? Figuring that we had changed on them. We said no no, we're the African Jazz Arts Society. So we put it AJASS, African Jazz Arts Society and Studio, because now we had a studio on 125<sup>th</sup> Street where people would come, hang out, as well as we would do our programs. And later on we would do the thing with the whole black is beautiful thing, where the women wear their hair natural in 1962. We were doing all - - the stuff that came out from the group - - that's why we're talking about next year will be the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of AJAZZ, we just say AJAZZ totally - -

[crosstalk]

MG: We'll try to have something in Crotona Park. We'll try to have some jazz festival in Crotona Park, okay?

MN: Now one of the things - -

MG: Is that good?

MN: - - we wanted to ask about, were some of the club owners who were promoting music also hooked into drugs on the side?

Unknown: Well we never knew that because it was like you only see them once in a while.

[crosstalk]

Unknown: He was Italian [inaudible]. But anyway, he was always promoting the guys to come and it was like a set in there. And there were no drugs in there cuz he didn't allow that.

MN: What's this at 845?

Unknown: Yeah, uh, no. Salt and Pepper

MN: Salt and Pepper

Unknown: Yeah.

MN: Now what about back at 845 and all those places?

[crosstalk]

EB: 845, the owner was Joe Tucci. Joe Tucci was clean, he was the owner - -

MG: Was he the owner or the manager?

EB: He was the owner.

MN: He was clean?

EB: Yeah, he was clean. I mean - - what Joe Tucci did, is when we were trying to find a place, he had an ideal spot, he had a hell of a spot. Because it was like levels, so you could sit in there with tables all the way to the top.

MG: In the back.

EB: Yeah. Beautiful rooms man. So what he did, since he didn't have nothing going on, he gave us a spot.

MG: On Sunday.

EB: For the Sunday after, yeah. So we didn't have to pay him no money. But the thing is, we got the door, he got the liquor.

MN: He got the liquor.

EB: Because see the thing - -

[crosstalk]

Unknown: And let me tell you something about the guys who played for [inaudible] because that's [inaudible] used to bring the families out on Sunday afternoon from one to seven or something like that.

EB: Yeah.

MN: Wow.

MG: Oh nice! That's so nice.

Unknown: Yes, that's how [inaudible] was. She came from Mississippi - -

[crosstalk]

MN: this is called Pepper and Salt?

Unknown: Yes, yes.

MG: Who is Freddie's girl? I don't know Freddie's - -

Unknown: Freddie Jewel, Kenny Jewel's brother. Now he was great but he never became big. He was just as good as his brother.

MG: What does he play?

Unknown: He played organ and piano. He also, his nephew which was Kenny Jewel Jr., he started out as rock. Now he came in in '70 - - he was playing rock and he got mixed up in jazz like his father, Kenny Jewel Sr. And all those guys come to Salt and Pepper - - a lot of us played rock, then they changed up to jazz, a lot of them out there. Who was this other- this guy, Steve Torre.

MG: Ah, the trombone player.

Unknown: Yes. Now he was - - he's out there big time.

MG: He played with Ray Charles first?

Unknown: I don't know if he played - -

MG: Yeah, his brother played drums.

EB: Speaking of Ray Charles, we had both Benny Rocher and Benny Carter.

Unknown: Benny Rocher, the one who did the 8 train with Duke in California.

MG: Yeah.

EB: Yeah.

Unknown: Is she still living?

EB: And then we had Joe Carol, we had - -

MN: This is all at 845?

EB: At 845. We had all of them.

Unknown: Joe Carol, school days?

EB: Yeah, yeah. And then Earl Coleman.

Unknown: Oh, he's still around isn't he?

EB: I don't know. That's a long time ago, he might be all - -

Unknown: Earl Coleman, now that's a guy - -

EB: If he's around now - -

Unknown: West coast, west coast. I think I heard something last year, Earl Coleman did something with Joshua Redman's father.

MG: He would do it.

Unknown: Oh Lord, [inaudible].

MG: And don't call him Joshua Redman's father because he's hate that [laughs].

Unknown: I didn't know that before but I found out they never talked to him like - -  
[crosstalk]

Unknown: See these kinds of memories are positive memories. You triggered something when you mentioned, when you started mentioning [inaudible], I think of about 40 people that became famous. And then I started thinking about the guys that passed on like Wardell and [inaudible] which people don't even know. And Gina Evans.

MG: Um, excuse me, that was my husband.

Unknown: Excuse me, wait a minute, Dexter Gordon - - pleasure to meet you.

[laughter]

MG: I know about Wardell Grey, but I didn't meet him because he died in '55 and I was too young. But Dexter - - I know all about Wardell.

Unknown: I remember when he came back - - now I got the tape. My nephew, I'm gonna choke him cuz I never got the tape back. When he came back with Johnny Griffin - -

MG: Yeah.

Unknown: - - and did the thing at Carnegie Hall.

MG: You have a tape?

Unknown: I had to choke my nephew to get it back. I said, you like rock, what do you know about this? [inaudible] I said but what do you know about me. I said, give it back to me. And I had to almost beg him to get that tape back.

MN: [laughs]

MG: Oh good.

[crosstalk]

Unknown: But before that Johnny Griffin played bassoon. He played oboe, bassoon and stuff, like Herbie Hancock, like a child protégé. [inaudible] with the Griffin brothers.

When Esteban came back and then they made the movie - -

MG: Yeah.

Unknown: - - and I wanted some money from people, they say, there wasn't no jazz musician ever - -

MG: Nominated for an Oscar, right [laughs].

Unknown: I said, where you been living?

[laughs]

Unknown: [inaudible]. But Dexter Gordon got an academy award nomination. He would've won that if it weren't for Paul Newman [inaudible].

EB: Yeah, right!

MG: There you go. Right. We knew that before.

EB: And when Dexter was working back then, Dexter was something else.

MG: Uh huh, he was good.

Unknown: When he'd walk, he had such a stage presence.

EB: Yeah.

Unknown: Such a stage presence. That everybody in Hollywood - - he just whacked out - - when he walked across, the camera had to slow down cuz he just whacked everybody out just by his looks alone. Just by his - - you know, like he said, even as high school,

when you did a recital in school with the clarinet or something you were dressed and you carried that. You didn't go out - - you didn't go looking bad when you go. You went to see a concert and if you played good or played bad, the guys like [inaudible] to push yourself, so you gotta go ahead and play. He'd push you and say, keep playing, keep practicing, keep practicing.

EB: Yeah, yeah.

Unknown: He'd encourage you. They didn't put you down.

EB: They wouldn't try and discourage so you wouldn't be a threat. You see what I'm saying? It wasn't about that.

MG: No, no.

Unknown: [inaudible] I learned so much in that short time then in high school just by playing with the guys on the set. I could hear better. I heard - - on paper it's not the same thing. And you started hearing sounds underneath that you weren't taught. You said, oh there's something else to this. That's what made Miles Davis play [inaudible]. He found his voice in [inaudible].

EB: I told 'em. I told 'em, that's the way it was.

MG: Right, exactly.

Unknown: But you know who was his tutor? We couldn't play nothing of - -

MG: Clark Terry. Oh I just saw him last week.

Unknown: Clark Terry [inaudible].

[crosstalk]

Unknown: and you could hear Clark Terry and you could hear the roots when Miles played. But Miles never forgot his roots.

MG: That's right.

Unknown: Clark Terry, you could hear Clark Terry. But then when Miles went to the mute and when Ted Baker see was the [inaudible]. Time after time he just [inaudible].

But then Miles played time after time his way with his group. [inaudible]

[crosstalk]

Unknown: And then when Miles into the [inaudible], he found his voice without playing high. He found out how his lips, his chops, and his ombeture. So, that's when he took off and took everybody out, including Clifford Brown.

MG: [laughs]

EB: Yeah, see that's the thing [inaudible] - -

MG: So what was the name of the jazz festival, I mean the thing, the big festival when you had at the International Inn? How'd you call that?

EB: It was called Jazz and Barbecue. Pick a rib and dig a riff [laughs].

MG: Pick a rib and dig a riff?

[crosstalk]

MN: Do you have any of the flyers from those events?

[laughter]

[crosstalk]

Unknown: I just got finished handing out the one from what he did in Copenhagen, all that stuff he did live. Because a lot of people don't know how much stuff that man played.

MG: Yeah.

Unknown: And I'm gonna tell you something else he did too. He'd taken some of Bird's riffs and put them in a tenor. He transposed into - - because he had a tag, bah, bah, bah, bah, bah [claps hands to beat]. And Dexter got the tag. A lot of guys do a lot of slurs but he do a lot of tags, second note [hums a rhythm]. You'd know that sound - -

MG: [laughs]

Unknown: - - it's Dexter's sound.

MG: And I know why you like him, because he looks like one of his relatives, okay, doesn't he? [laughs] He looks like his [inaudible] - -

EB: Coltrane, Coltrane liked him too.

Unknown: But Coltrane was playing [inaudible] - -

EB: Yeah, that's what I said. Coltrane - - yeah, yeah.

Unknown: Coltrane went through four different stages as a young person. I've got things with Coltrane playing like a, Curtis, Curtis, what is Curtis - -

MG: Uh, uh, uh - -

EB: [inaudible]

Unknown: He did something - -

EB: With Dexter - -

MG: King Curtis.

Unknown: King Curtis.

EB: King - -

MN: Oh right!

Unknown: I remember when Coltrane was sounding like that in the Earl Bostick band.

MG: Yeah, right.

Unknown: See when the [inaudible] turntables on trumpet.

EB: Yeah, that's when he was walking on the stages out in Philadelphia.

MG: Right, right.

EB: Walking the bar in Philadelphia.

Unknown: Earl Bostick wouldn't let nobody - - he was mad. But when he went with the

Lionel Hampton Band, Lionel Hampton played alto. See a lot of people didn't know. I

heard Coltrane on alto and he was so close to Bird so he transferred his stuff into tenor.

But in his early tenor years, he used to do a lot of honking and squeaking like Sal

Mystical, I remember about him. Sal Mystical - -

MG: I remember Sal.

Unknown: - - Sal Mystical would play with - -

MG: woody Herman.

Unknown: Woody Herman also - - this show that they had at [inaudible], what's his

name, the one that got all the hotels in Las Vegas - -

MG: Oh, Wynn?

Unknown: No, that was one of the other ones. Oh god, what's his name? I can't think of his name. Sal Mystical. And actually, I'm not be getting off the subject about the black American history because - -

[laughter]

Unknown: Because all these guys, like Sal Mystical [inaudible]. You hear all that in their playing. Even though the guy Louie Prima [inaudible]. Let me tell you something, if you go back and listen to the early Chewberry, Lester Young, and, what's this other guy's name? Which a lot of people forgot about him. He played oboe. Was his name- no, Sydney Bachet - -

MN: Oh wow, this stuff is - -

EB: Clarinets - -

MN: Clarinet?

EB: Clarinet, yeah.

[crosstalk]

Unknown: when you hear Sydney Bachet, the guys playing soprano saxophone and all this. The only person that comes close to what he was able to do, was the only one who had the New Orleans feeling, was this kid, Marcellus Brother.

EB: Yeah, [inaudible].

Unknown: That's the closest. But I see a lot of guys play soprano, but nobody, I never heard nobody play like - -

MG: Played it like that, uh huh.

Unknown: And he was evil because he'd let everybody see the notes then say, you're trying to steal.

[laughter]

Unknown: That's what they did during that time right.

EB: What I was saying was that when we had Benny Carter came down one time at 845.

What she would do is she would come. I'd get her and she'd come from Jersey, come over to play. And then we'd have a pick-up band. You know? Because we didn't have - - cuz she couldn't, you couldn't have her bring her band or nothing like that. So we had a brother there called Bruno [inaudible]. Brother has been a drummer for a long time out there. Never got - -

Unknown: That sounds familiar.

MG: Yeah doesn't it?

EB: And then there was another brother who was a drummer. So when we were doing the thing, you know they were just doing their little strokes and everything and then she says that she's gonna sing, "Don't weep for lady." You know? So they didn't know it, so she just told them [inaudible] she went acapella. So she had the place just hushed. I mean the place was quiet. And she started to do that and they started to come on and everything else like that. So after that, Benny went to do the thing with Ray Charles, the duo. And this is that time when Ray Charles was in need of a drummer. And Betty turned Ray Charles onto this brother Bruno who had never played a part of a major gig ever. You know, he was probably just going around doing his own thing. And he had that job for

years, he said to me, thank you brother, I'll never forget it. I mean this was his biggest time [inaudible] but just because he happened to be there when she came.

Unknown: Well that's how Rodney Jones got with Lena Owens.

MG: Yeah, right!

Unknown: Because she heard him and she said who's that. [inaudible].

MN: Now 1958, you come to the Bronx. You moved to Morisannia?

Unknown: No. I came to the Bronx because I was working with the Port Authority. I had just come out of the army. [inaudible], I worked for the Port Authority. A friend of mine lived on Jackson Avenue between Boston Road and a hundred and - - Jackson Avenue right off of 166<sup>th</sup> street, right behind Morris High.

MN: Right, okay.

Unknown: Jackson Avenue, I came then. That's when I started learning about the Bronx.

MN: Now what was Boston Road like? You came soon Arch. What was Boston Road like in the '50's and '60's.

Unknown: Trolley cars, rose bushes.

MG: You're kidding?

Unknown 2: Trolley car, that was my name.

MN: [laughs]

MG: What number?

[crosstalk]

MN: So what were the - - was Boston - - there were a lot of clubs along Boston Road?

Unknown: Okay now, let me see, during that time was- no, I can't tell you about the '50's except 845. I don't know Boston Road. Now, Goodson Town - -

MG: Oh, Goodson's?

Unknown: Right, Goodson Town, that's when [inaudible].

[crosstalk]

EB: Right, and on the other side of the street was the Blue Morocco.

Unknown 2: Blue Morocco. Then we go north up to where Boston Road and Prospect come, just a little bit to the side was Kenny's place that you used to talk about, by Crotona Park.

[crosstalk]

MN: No, its west of the Concourse. It's a totally different neighborhood.

Unknown: Between the Concourse and Jerome Avenue, near the bottom.

MN: You see, that couldn't have opened in that time because African Americans couldn't move to that neighborhood until co-op city opened. So it's a post - - that neighborhood becomes a center post-1965, '68.

Unknown: Right. Then you say '68-'70, '70 up to about '83 before the [inaudible]. But that was a place for about 10 years.

MN: See Jerome Avenue was a whole scene in the '70's because that was where the first hip hop clubs were.

[crosstalk]

MN: Yeah, Boston Road was '50's, '60's. But you didn't op - - but Jerome Avenue didn't start till the late '60's. Because this is - -

Unknown: This still is in 167<sup>th</sup> Street because there was like - -

MN: Oh yea. That was down by the L.

Unknown: Yeah, right. Just before you get the L, it was on the left side. Now, the reason I said it because Butterbean and Suzy lived over there. Remember the Koreans? I used to see them all the time. And I used to see Machito when I would go down by a hundred and - -

EB: Sixty?

Unknown: - - where Herd's used to be. I used to see him all the time so I know - -

MG: He lived in the Bronx?

Unknown: Yeah, yeah?

MG: Machito?

Unknown: All the way back then. But they were still walking around and this girl, Lalupe.

MG: Oh yeah.

Unknown: But anyway, they used to come. Like you had some Latin guys who used to come in there also. I don't know who they were. But they used to come and sit in there too. But, one of the times, when was it that Harvey James stole a Illinois Jenkins piece called, "Don't you go away May?" He called it "Black Velvet." And he sued Harvey James for stealing the musical part [hums the musical part].

EB: That's was - - that's Dr. Jive's theme song.

Unknown: Yeah, right but [inaudible].

EB: Yeah that's right [inaudible].

Unknown: And Harvey James took it because Harvey James got mad because he couldn't play some of those [inaudible]. So Harvey took it and Jenkins sued him and he still gets money for his family.

MG: Oh!

Unknown: He still gets money from that money [inaudible]. There's a lot of stuff about people stealing licks.

MG: Uh huh. Yeah, right, right.

Unknown: I hear licks. I hear [inaudible] for a lot of people. I hear - - but see, Dexter had a unique [inaudible]. He took - - nobody did that. I don't care how good they played. And if you notice something, how many people, saxophone players that Miles, that played with him? It wasn't but a few. Now, Gene Abbott never played with him. What's his name played for a little while - -

MG: George Coleman.

Unknown: George Coleman, also another guy, another tall guy did something with him. I can't think of him. But there wasn't too many guys like - - he couldn't mess with - -

MG: Wayne Shorter played with him.

Unknown: Wayne Shorter, that's the - - Wayne Shorter. But not too many guys, not too many white guys I don't think - -

MG: Later, he had an all white band.

[crosstalk]

EB: The first two white tenor players he got. One was [inaudible]

MG: [inaudible]

[crosstalk]

MG: Steve Grossman he had.

EB: No, no. This was before that. I'm saying the first ones. And Bobby Jasper who came out of Belgium. And it was something, right after the [inaudible]. I said, Miles why you about to go get a Belgian man, we fighting - -

Unknown: Well the Belgians, like the Germans, they listen to - - there's a lot of good music in that part of the world.

EB: Yeah, well we were saying, we were being political and saying, all them cats - -

Unknown: Well Miles would do things that make people laugh, he used to do things.

[laughter]

Unknown: And what can you say, you know because [inaudible]. Go ahead, I could sit here and talk all day.

MN: [laughs]

Unknown: And still learn something about - - what you told me about, I didn't know about Bobby Jasper.

EB: Yeah Bobby Jasper, yeah.

[crosstalk]

EB: but you know what I saw? One guy went into Club Bohemia and Miles was in there with Coltrane and Sonny Rollins came in there and sat in there and Kenny Durham. So you had the two trumpet players, [inaudible], the king of the trumpet, you know? And you had - -

Unknown: Coltrane.

EB: - - Coltrane and - -

MG: And Sonny.

EB: - - and Sonny

Unknown: [inaudible] is from Prospect Avenue. His brother - -

MN: His brother was a doctor.

Unknown: - - was a doctor.

MN: Dr. Rollins. On Prospect and where?

Unknown: Before you even get to 845. It was on this side going toward 845 - -

MG: Is his brother living?

Unknown: I don't know if Dr. Rollins - -

MN: I don't think so. Now did Sonny Rollins ever play at 845?

EB: No.

MG: He played there in the '40's.

EB: Yeah, he played [inaudible] before that. But the point is that then he also went off.

Then he went into his - -

MN: Now did you ever have front - -

MG: Stop, wait, wait, stop. Okay.

MN: Okay, we gotta change. Is Brian still here?

[crosstalk]

[END OF TAPE 2 SIDE B]

[END OF INTERVIEW]