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## Capers, Valerie Interview 3

Capers, Valerie. Bronx African American History Project  
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Interviewee: Valerie Capers  
Interviewer: Unnamed Female  
Date: February 15, 2007

Interviewer (IN): This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> oral history interview with Valerie Capers in her beautiful apartment at 8—I'm not saying her address on the Grand Concourse, on the Grand, Grand Concourse. We are The Bronx African American History Project and we are doing a long-term oral history project with Valerie Capers and we've done 2 and we may repeat some things but basically we want to talk about your life, your career. And I want to start by asking you about a photo. And I'm holding this photo in my hand and you're wearing this very, very—you see this, elegant gown, with a very elegant like shawl, or piece? Is that part of the dress or is that a separate piece?

Valerie Capers (VC): You mean the John Haggans? No that was part of the dress.

IN: Stunning.

VC: Wasn't it something?

IN: And the white gloves. And do you know who the other people in the photo are?

VC: Oh yes, it was quite—it was in fact it's amazing, 20 years ago this year, 1987. It was the first of the Essence awards. And that—it was out in California and that time, among the people who received the award, Doctor Dorothy Heights got an award. Marla Gibbs, a wonderful woman preacher by the name of Barbara King, she's not part of the King family but she's from Atlanta and she's just wonderful. And a Georgia, I can't remember her last name, I think her name may be in the picture, she's a lady who did, did wonderful work with teenagers with drug problems in Boston. And then of course, Oprah Winfrey.

IN: Fabulous photo. So what do you remember about that event?

VC: [Inaudible] and so you know, Milton Berle had a table full of people and they were sitting right at that front table, right by the stage there. And some of Milton's friends said, and you

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understand this music? He said what do you mean this, this a, this a jungle bunny music? No, I don't understand this jungle bunny music and then they all laughed. And Miles said he was so upset that he made up his mind that one day, he said, they felt very bad about that, but nobody said anything and then started it. And he said one day—so he was; now this is like 25 years later. He's coming back from California on a plane, sitting first class and there's Milton Berle. And 25 years now, so he says, Mr. Berle, I'm Miles Davis, he says nice to meet you; he said I've been waiting to say something to you for 25 years. He said yes? You know thinking that it's going to be something--. So he told him about him being in the club and sitting at that front table and referring to their music as jungle bunny music and how everybody was very upset by it, and insulted by it and he said, you know, Milton Berle's, you know just went acid, you know and then finally he said, oh I'm sorry, I'm sorry, he said well you should be. He says I've been waiting all these years to find the opportunity to tell you that. He said the way you dismissed our music and our art and our efforts and--.

IN: Do you think maybe he said it in a more rude way than he recounted that--?

VC: Perhaps, you know maybe, you know maybe, maybe not.

IN: Maybe not, but you know that's very common that people will wait for their opportunity because this is an interview about Valerie but I'll just tell you with Dexter, what happened with Dexter. Calloway wrote an article, well you know, they had his name on it, article in Ebony talking about how the bebop musicians were ruining the music business because they were drug addicts and he listed all the guys that were drug addicts and he had Dexter's name in the article. And Dexter's mother you know, Dexter's father was a doctor she played bridge, she wore pearls, she wore gloves right and with the ladies, and there it is in Ebony. Because you know they read Ebony.

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VC: Of course.

IN: She was mortified. Mortified, she wouldn't leave the house. I'm through, I'm not going to church, I'm not going to prayers, it's over, oh she was so upset.

VC: Isn't that something.

IN: And he was like that was unnecessary. Named Mordel and everybody, they're ruining it for us. These bebop guys. So Dexter waited and waited and then he said, I'm going to say something one of these days, you know? And then Dexter after he got nominated for the Oscar he got the Urban League Achievement Award or something. He said the Urban League has never cared one thing about jazz and these bougie people, no I'm not going. Then he saw that it was being presented by Cab Calloway, I'm going. He called the limousine, get dressed I'm going to this affair. Because at first he was going to say tell them I'm out of town. So he went, and he wasn't loud, he took him aside and he was like you know, he was like I'm so happy for you and the nomination you deserve it and all and he said you know, I didn't appreciate what you did in Ebony, we didn't deserve that. And he said I've been waiting to tell you that was wrong, you were wrong and he got quiet.

VC: I bet he did.

IN: And he was like, then you know that's really bothered me all these years, now that was 40 years later right?

VC: And what could he say—I know he must've, he must've ruined his evening for the whole night. Cab Calloway's evening.

IN: Oh, he shut up and he was like and you really upset my mother, and you know these guys are 80 years old, and you upset my mother.

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VC: Of course, of course, oh man, listening to that, I know—I got to tell you just this one more thing.

[Crosstalk]

VC: And you know, Lyle, many people think Lyle is kind of hard and gruff but he's a softie and he's been so loving and kind to me all these years but what I wanted to tell you is that I did—I took this teaching, teaching course just to get the credits I needed to get a high school license. I figured I should have everything, you know, I was on the faculty at Manhattan School and I could take the courses without paying for them. So I—one of these course the pedagogy courses, I brought a group in to have them play and I brought a group in rather and I brought, and I brought some of my students who studied with me to play for them, you know we interview them and do all those things and Lyle was, Lyle of course was playing bass for me and this Doctor Lemure who was the head of the department—you know the education, getting the courses and teacher's ed rather, so way back and I remember this, I'll never forget it, I remember when it happened, Lyle was getting ready to get his Master's and Lyle now had been first chair, concertmaster in the All City Orchestra and Doctor Lemure was the conductor and everything like that so he knew what Lyle could do and all sorts of stuff like this, Lyle was waiting to get the loan, the college loan that he had made to pay for his Master's year. The loan was going to be one day late and do you know that Doctor Lemure did nothing to keep Lyle from being disqualified to get that--? Lyle was so hurt and he was so angry and bitter about it and he never got, got it and he—so, so and, and got the money the next day, the next day and they wouldn't, they wouldn't take it, Lemure wouldn't, you know, so now this is now, this is now 20 years later and we got that's right—no, and we got into the class and he said oh, Lyle Atkinson, he said yes, he said I'd like to speak to you, I had no idea this was all going on. So he took—went outside

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with Doctor Lemure and he told him about himself, you know? Not mad like you said, he said you know, you knew me I was the concertmaster we had a good teaching, student relationship, I said I was one day off from getting my loan, he said, and because you didn't do anything to help so that they school would accept my money so I could go on. And he said and I never got my—and Lyle said he said look I'm so sorry you can come now free, you won't have to pay a cent, you can come here. He said no it's too late now, he said when I needed it, he said I couldn't get it, he said now you can't, you can't do anything for me now. But I wanted to let you know. I didn't realize—Doctor Lemure was so upset he never came back to class, I was doing the demonstration class and my students went he never came back into the class. So I mean you know so people don't forget things you know? That's right.

IN: They don't forget. No. And if they have the opportunity to say something it's good. I think it's really good. You guys carry that forever, you know? I'm very big on you got something to say, say it. Okay, now this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, oral history interview with Valerie Capers in her apartment on The Grand Concourse in The Bronx. The date is February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007 and we're doing an ongoing oral history interview with Valerie and I just want to begin with this beautiful photo of Valerie, let's hold it still in this stunning gown. Please tell about the designer. We love this designer.

VC: Oh, yes. The designer is John Haggans and he was recommended to me by someone at Essence magazine. A wonderful guy, very creative, and he, I mean it was, it was one of the high points in, in my life because I've never been a fashion plate like that. You know I've always—but the design was, I mean people just awed and ooed when I stepped out of the elevator. It was just wonderful, just wonderful. All the way up, all the way up opera gloves and the jewelry outside on the bracelets. It was just, it was just wonderful. And you know that's, that's—and they

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had, they had a wonderful dinner before the awards were given and I was sitting next to Famous Amos you know?

IN: Yes.

VC: And he was teasing me because everybody was eating and I wouldn't eat a thing because I wasn't about to take off those gloves or mess up that outfit. Listen I was starving; when that thing was over I had to go upstairs and order room service I was really hungry. But I was, it was, it was a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful glamorous moment in my life.

IN: Could you just say who else is in the photo with you?

VC: Oh, yes, yes Marla Gibbs the actress of course, and then Doctor Dorothy Heights, she received, I don't even think she's alive now.

IN: No, I don't either.

VC: Yes, and let me see, a Doctor Barbara King she's a wonderful minister and she's from Atlanta but not related to, you know the King family, Doctor King's family. And then a Georgia and forgive me I can't remember her last name. She came from Boston and she had done work. We were all picked for you know, our contributions and because we were people that the public wouldn't generally know, you know? And then of course it was Oprah Winfrey, so it was, it was very exciting.

IN: And in this photo who has the best gown?

VC: I think I do.

[Laughter]

IN: Who is the most elegant?

VC: Mr. Haggans did it.

IN: He picked the earrings and the whole thing?

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VC: Well they did. The people of Essence magazine picked all the rest of the, the things, you know?

IN: Do you, do you have another one of these because otherwise next time we come I'll scan it.

VC: No I don't but you're certainly welcome to--.

IN: I can scan it.

VC: Absolutely, absolutely.

IN: It's framed—okay well that's fabulous. Okay so now, I'm just going to repeat a few things and then we'll—because you have a very long and illustrious career. Since this is about The Bronx, where are you born?

VC: I was born in The Bronx, I believe I was born in Lincoln Hospital.

IN: And can you tell us the date of your birth?

VC: Do I really have to?

IN: Yes, this is oral history this is not for public consumption. This is for academic uses.

VC: Actually I hate telling you, but everyone—I tell people, everyone says it beats the alternative. May 24<sup>th</sup>, now let me see what year so I give you—1935.

IN: It's unbelievable we know this about you but we like to have our facts straight. So you're born in The Bronx?

VC: Yes.

IN: Your parents, when did they move to The Bronx?

VC: They moved to The Bronx shortly after they were married in the early '30s, in the early—they were married in 1930 and they moved to The Bronx shortly after that. And I think I'd mentioned to you once that there was quite a migration of young married, Harlemites who moved from that general neighborhood, my mother said all the people they knew lived in like



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138<sup>th</sup> Street, 139<sup>th</sup>, 140<sup>th</sup>, 41<sup>st</sup> around 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue you know in that area and they all moved up to

The Bronx, and they moved up to what is known as the Williamsburg section of The Bronx, which is—well it's more inhabited now than it was before. A lot of it I guess was still, a little bit woods and trees and things like that but a lot—yes, a little bit like the country. Private, private houses, maybe 2 family houses and 3 family houses. And that's where all of them lived at the time.

UP: Now, do you know the address--?

VC: No, I have no idea.

UP: You know the section that--?

VC: Yes, Williamsbridge section, yes.

UP: And when you were born where were they living?

VC: They were living a little further south in The Bronx, I think somewhere around 168<sup>th</sup> Street maybe or 167<sup>th</sup> first then maybe moved to 168<sup>th</sup> between Prospect Avenue and Union Avenue, that area.

UP: That's where—when you were born where they were living?

VC: I think somewhere in that area, yes.

UP: And then they moved again?

VC: Then they—well they, they, they stayed generally in that area. When I was a little girl, like about 3, 4, 5, and 6, they were living at first at 802 East 168<sup>th</sup> Street and then they—that was an apartment house—and then they moved across the street to one of the brownstones. There was a whole row of the brownstones, in fact the McFeeders are in one of those brownstones. Yes, that's right, yes, and then Harriet they lived at 819 and we lived in 811, that's where I lost my sight, I was living in 811 when I lost my sight.

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UP: And then when you came out of the hospital--?

VC: That's right when I came out of the hospital I came to—I came to another apartment because the, the social service workers and the people at Columbia Pres told my mother and father that they thought it would be a very good idea for their mental health too because my losing my sight was harder on them than it was myself, you know? I was just a little girl and I was rolling with the punches and you know one day I could see and the next day I couldn't but for my mother and father they had a little girl now who was blind and it was—I guess it was kind of hard for them. So they thought for their emotional stability it would be good to move, so we moved about a block and a half away to 1278 Union Avenue and that's between Freeman and Ritter Place and I can never think of 1278 without getting a lump in my throat because that was so much a part of my life, you know, from the time I was in grade school through the years I was in Julliard, I was still living in that place when I graduated from Julliard, I mean I was there a long time yes.

IN: So then when Bobby was born they were living there?

VC: Well Bobby was born—Bobby was born in 1939 so he was born when we were living there around 167<sup>th</sup> or 168<sup>th</sup>.

IN: So he was born when you lost your sight?

VC: I could see when Bobby was born, yes there's 4 years between us and Bobby--.

IN: He was 2?

VC: Yes he was 2 when I was 6, that's right, that's right.

IN: So was he helpful to his big sister as he grew up?

VC: Yes, he grew up. You know, he didn't make a career out of being helpful you know. We were just a loving brother and sister. My parents once told me that when I first came out of the

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hospital, poor Bobby, you know he was a little kid and they were so preoccupied with what was happening with me and so a lot of things were going on with my parents and they had friends, an African American gentleman who was married to a German girl, and her name was Frieda and they used to baby-sit for Bobby and it's funny when I first came back from the hospital, and as I said he was 2, he was walking and stumbling around and stuff like that and he developed those broad, those broad a's that the Germans have, he used to call me Valerie [elongating the a], you know they pronounce their V like an F and he used to call me Valerie, for a long time.

[Laughter]

VC: And he was just 2 years old. Just 2 years old calling me Valerie but then, but then you know he got away from that as we started living together as a family. And we are very close, I've always loved my brother and he always loved me and we had a natural—the fact that I couldn't see didn't make our sister, brother relationship different at all, you know? The thing about it is though that when I started going to the Institute for the Blind I was there during the week and home on the weekends so that went on from the time of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade until I graduated from high school.

IN: How was that, being away during the week when you were little?

VC: Well, it, it wasn't, you know it wasn't too bad of course my—it, it wasn't as if I away in another state or something and it's funny, it just—I don't know how to say but it just seemed natural, you know it's something I'd always done, you know when I first went there, when I first came out of the hospital and I was just like 7 and I went to this school it was a little hard because I missed not having my mother and father around and my little brother but you know, as the years went on it, it was just, it was natural because I was home on the weekends, I was home on the holidays, I was home there during the summer and all but a lot of things I missed, that's why

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I was saying Bobby and I had such a, a diverse exposures in growing up because Bobby was there on Union Avenue and Boston Road and Prospect Avenue and Bobby was very, very aware of the streets and all the things that were going on and I had the elegant education. You know, very—I always said I had, I had a rich WASPY girl's education. I'm not saying that in a nasty way but I, I had a you know, if I was Anglo-Saxon, White Protestant, I would've had that education if my parents had lots of money, you know, I had the kind of education that my parents could never have afforded because the institute was an extraordinary place and the facilities were extraordinary.

IN: And so how would you get there? Like after the weekends?

VC: Okay, on after the weekend my father or mother would take me up you know? I remember my, my, my life as a, a, you know in junior high and high school when I think of my mother during those years I think of her on a Sunday morning and Sunday afternoon standing up in a little kitchen with an ironing board and there she was ironing my blouses and my skirts and getting all my clothes together for the week and I had to pack a suitcase, you know, and take it with me for the week, you know I'd always remember she spent her weekends getting my clothes clean and pressed and ready to go to school.

IN: Did you have a uniform?

VC: No, we didn't have uniforms, right.

IN: So when you were home on the weekends what would you do?

VC: Oh, we had lots of fun. We did so many, we did so many things as a family we went to the movies, Bobby and I you know we were interested in music from the—we would practice, we would talk about music. We'd visit relatives, we'd play games, you know, all, all those sort of things.

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UP: Do you still have friends from that period?

VC: It's amazing you ask, let me see, I'm trying to think now. Friends the majority--.

UP: Or like McFeeders you still know?

VC: Yes, the McFeeders I still know but my, my close associates—Harriet and her sister were the older girls. That's right. And it's Harriet's daughter Sousou that I was close to. She, I taught her piano for a while. I first met Sousou when I was doing some musical work for the all city chorus and Sousou was just, she was a delightful young lady. She was just sweet and she was funny and she was different from everybody else. I mean she had a sense of humor that was different and she had a spirituality that was different from the general teenager. I just thought she was terrific and my father loved it, he used to love to see, I was living in 1818 Anthony Avenue then, that's where we moved to after Union Avenue. Let me see we moved there in, we moved there in '67 so by that time I was 32, so you could imagine I was in 1278 from the time I was 7 years old until I was 32 years old. And so, Sousou used to come and she had a hairdo it was funny, she had, she had a hairdo that was rolled up and looked like a penis at the top of her head, you know? A really phallic symbol when they had the memorial service for Sousou I was describing her, you know, I said she came with this phallic symbol with her hair rolled up and everybody just started laughing you know. But-- and daddy would see it and he would just break up. And he had Parkinson's Disease and if daddy started laughing he would get so tickled, you know, and he couldn't talk or anything and she'd say, hi Mister Capers, how are you? And she'd come and give him a kiss on the cheek and you know, she, she was just adorable. But as far as friends, having friends of that era, I have one and that's Antoinette Brown. And she, it's interesting; she's the one that wrote to Mark to tell him about Kenny's. And when I saw that email from Mark I hurried up and called her, you know, and so she's the one that used to pick me

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up from school on Fridays before Bobby was old enough to come down from Olinville Junior

High and take me home, you know. So she used to come because my mother was a good friend of Antoinette's. But as far as other friends--.

UP: Maybe we could talk to Antoinette--?

VC: Yes, she's, she's a lovely lady.

UP: Would you ask her?

VC: Yes, I certainly will. And so the thing is that—as far as—my own particular friends, my real friends that I hung out with, there's only one or two of them that I still have—my friend Chris, Chris Kyler whom I really love so much, he passed away 3 years ago and we used to play in the sandbox together, you know. He'd build castles I'd knock them down and he'd get mad you know? So anyway and I really looked—so he was one and then the other one now I'd say there's really one more, and that's Tony Santiago. And he was salutatorian of the senior class I was valedictorian. I had such a crush on Tony in school, we were good friends but he didn't pay any attention to me in that area at all. You know I was just miserable, but he has a lovely family, his wife Betsy and—I spent the Saturday before Christmas they have a, he was from Puerto Rico, I met him in '45 when I was 10 years old, and he, he was among the first of the Puerto Ricans that migrated to New York during that time. And very intelligent man, very handsome young man he was too and, and so he has 3 children, his son Christopher Santiago and his 2 daughters both of them whom are, are adopted and it's a wonderful family. And his mom is still alive, she's about 92 now and so they have the traditional Puerto Rican Christmas thing and they spent all the time getting the, I can't remember the thing in the, in the corn husks you know, and fixing them up. I mean just everything, just lovely so we [inaudible] and we stay that's it, and we stayed, so we've stayed in touch so that's really. All my friends, my friends that I call my

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extended family because they are my family now because you know, my family's really gone and they're all friends that I was blessed to make as an adult. You know because sometimes you don't make friends like that when you're growing up but I was very blessed to meet some wonderful people and you know and to be embraced by them and I embrace them and so they're really my family you know?

IN: Oh, yes I know. And so did you go from the school directly to Julliard?

VC: That's interesting you should ask. Yes almost. I graduated from the institute in 1953. Miss Tony, my teacher, was my spiritual guide and the one that just, you know, just took my whole study over, you know from the time they sent me to the upper school from the lower school at the institute and to this day we still are close. If she lives 'til April 20<sup>th</sup> of this year she'll be 100 years old and she's just as sharp as we are. You wouldn't think--.

UP: Would she like to be interviewed?

VC: Well she's not—she's in North Carolina. Yes—but if she was close enough she would do it. Well, it's going to be quite a thing the affair so I'll let you know more about it.

UP: Where is her birthday?

VC: It's going to be in Arden, North Carolina.

UP: Are you going?

VC: Yes—no I'm going, I have to go. But I have a song I'm going to sing for her for her birthday and all these people—the family is you know, getting in touch to surprise her.

IN: [Inaudible]

VC: Yes, isn't that something, she knows, she knows that probably her—she thinks I think that the family is going to have a little dinner for her, but she has no idea the extent of what it's going to be. And I just—you know, I'm just, I'm just so excited about it. I said she—she said that if

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you breath on her she'll, she'll just fall over but her mind is a steel trap, she remembers everything, she's a remarkable woman. She really is.

UP: When's her birthday?

VC: April 20<sup>th</sup>.

[Crosstalk]

IN: Okay, so tell me how you got to Julliard?

VC: Okay, I just you know, somewhere, I knew when I was in high school and certainly around my second year in high, sophomore, junior, senior, I knew that music was the thing and like I wanted to go to—I just wanted to go to the Julliard School of Music, that was the place to go and that was where I set my—set my sights on that. And I just, you know, not only did I just love learning the music and all but at night we had a study hall, after, after supper and there was a study hall that went from 6:45 to 8 and the study hall was like 206, 207, 208. And Ms. Tody had a practice room and it was over 208 and I would often go into 208 to study because she would be upstairs practicing and I—I'd be doing my history and my English and my geometry or something like that and she'd be upstairs playing Brahms, Beethoven, and Franck and Bach and you know my, my, my heart just, just felt like it was going to burst because the music was so wonderful and I knew that that's the only thing in the world I ever wanted to do you know?

When I was 10 I thought I'd be a movie star, you know, but you know you change your mind about those things after a while. But so that was—and now just the opposite as far as Miss Tody is concerned happened to me when I was a senior because by the time I began, by the time I got to be a junior and senior in high school I was getting interested in bebop and jazz and I decided that I wanted to take a course and doing something—and I'd read and heard about John Mehegan. And I decided that I'd like to go and he had this course in the extension division at the



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Julliard School on Saturdays and daddy went with me. And I asked daddy would he go, and so I went down there and that's how I met Mister Mehegan. I went every week and I, I—my progress Mister Mehegan felt that I really had something, he was wonderful because even when the course was over he gave me individual lessons for nothing, you know he was wonderful. I met George Shearing because of John Mehegan and Marian McPartland and things like that. And so what happened is that—remember I said I lived at the institute during the week and Miss Tody took my life over, you know I mean. I didn't go to social hour because I didn't have a boyfriend, I was always [inaudible]—she wouldn't, I, I, I always wanted to be in the drama club but she said there was too much hanky panky going on in the drama club and I needed to practice. So my problem was, I had every kind of difficulty you can imagine trying to practice and prepare myself for each Saturday's lesson. I went home on Friday but I was there Monday through Friday and Miss Tody was always, I mean I could be practicing and she could be in the room. I remember once I couldn't get this run in a Beethoven sonata and I kept going over it and finally she came to the door and she said, I'm so tired of hearing you struggling over that—let me—come into my room and let me give you the right fingering. She listened and heard everything, kept [inaudible] of everything I did. And I was trying so hard I remember sneaking over to the boy's side of the building, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor which was the music department. Finding a corner room and praying that she wouldn't be looking for me or something so I could try to learn to play a blues or something like that. It wasn't too successful because I was so scared that she'd find me and I'd be in real trouble. So her devotion and her dedication to me was a real stumbling block when I decided that I wanted to you know expand my, my playing on the piano. I just, I couldn't do anything because I was under her thumb all the time and that was a real detriment, you know to my advancement.

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IN: Were there other students in the school that became musicians because they had such a big music program?

[Crosstalk]

VC: There were a lot of talented—we had a lot of talented singers in my school. We had talented saxophone players, flute players. I was about the only piano player. There were a couple of other people who played piano pretty well, not as well I did, but there were lots of talented kids and they got, they got the proper lessons and the training we got the theory, we got everything. So we had a chorus and we sang all over the place, I think I told you this story about the chorus in Washington when I didn't go. So we, we you know, so the music, the music was an important part of our education.

IN: But you were the only one that went on to go to Julliard?

VC: Oh, yes, yes it--.

[Crosstalk]

VC: And surprisingly enough Miss Tody wanted me to apply for an Ivy League school. So she had me apply to Barnard College and I applied to Barnard College the same time as Julliard and I got accepted with a full scholarship and she was so excited. Now that's where she wanted me to go. Now ordinarily I wouldn't have enough guts at that age to defy Miss Tody about something that she wanted but she really wanted me to go to Barnard and I really wanted to go to Julliard and I decided that I'm going to have to stick to going to Julliard. She may get mad if she wants to but I have to stick to going to Julliard. So that's, that's what happened.

IN: Did she get mad?

VC: No, I don't think she did.

IN: But were there other Black children in the school for the blind?

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VC: You know, there were, there were a couple. And when I say a couple I really mean a couple.

IN: Was that an issue?

VC: I don't think it was an issue with us as students, or an issue as far as them coming to the school. I do hear things though about it being an issue about whether, whether or not if you were African American you can get hired at the school, you know? Because you know, I think they, they didn't want—first of all we don't take African Americans, colored folks, as they called them then, and secondly after the colored folks we don't take Jews. You know so it was one of those things and--.

IN: Because the Jews have their own school for blind right?

VC: No, no they have the Jewish Guild for the Blind yes.

IN: Right.

VC: That's not a school and they have—just like they have the Catholic Guild for the Blind. Those are agencies that do training and rehabilitation and you know, that that's different, that's right. That's right.

IN: But the institute did they have—do you know how many Black students there were?

VC: Okay, I'll tell you I think there may have been, let me see there was Annie Lorie Ellis, there was Mary McCray, Louis Wilson, Benjamin Page, then there was Mary McGee at one time she was there. That's, that's all I—I can think of it when—Joanne Cutler, she was in my class. We were the 2 African Americans in the class and Harold, Harold Cummings, he I think he went on, I think he lives in Chicago and he went on to be a minister, he went to Drew University in New Jersey. And I would say between 7 and 10.

IN: And did they all go on to good higher education?

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VC: Some of them and then others didn't. I would say for the most part the majority of them, Louis Wilson did and, and, and Sylvester Bradford, he wrote you know, you know that rock two tears on my pillow, Sylvester wrote that one. I would say between 7 and 10. No they went off and went to work and did things like that. I was the only, I was the only Black student at the time who went on to a college like that, in my time, you know in my time.

IN: Is it still, is it still such a good institution as it was?

VC: It's different, it's not the same anymore. When I was there of course it was the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind. Now because of so many changes in education and training and concepts of how one should be educated the school just simply couldn't exist with taking only blind students. So now it is the New York Institute for Special Education.

IN: Oh, that's different from.

VC: Yes, that, that's right. So the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind no longer exists. You and Dawn I'll have to bring you up there one day, they have quite a campus and it extends from—it's on Pelham Parkway and it extends from Williamsbridge Road right straight through to Bronxwood Avenue.

IN: Do they still have the housing where you--?

VC: Oh, yes, yes and of course some of the housing has been adjusted and many of the buildings have been adjusted to be able to accommodate wheelchairs and things--.

[Crosstalk]

VC: And it's interesting the history of that, that, that property was given—I didn't know that until I got my award from the institute last October. But that property was given to I forgot who it was—over there on Pelham Parkway that had originally been property that was owned by the Astor family.

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IN: Oh, really?

VC: That's right. Yes, yes so one of the Astors of course went down in the Titanic and then the other one I don't know whether it was the son or whatever, they were looking for a place and he sold that land to them--. But anyway--.

UP: You got an award?

VC: Last October—I think it's on—yes it's on the piano, it's on the piano, it's the one that has the star. It's glass, and I think it's on—I think John put it on this little piano here and it has Braille on the base? Yes it weighs a ton. Yes.

IN: Oh, my God.

VC: Yes, isn't that something.

UP: Oh, I see Braille on the bottom.

VC: That's right, that's right.

UP: And then it says The New York Institute for Special Education, now right?

VC: Yes, yes.

UP: 173 years? Is that a 3?

VC: I think it's a 5.

UP: Thank you.

[Laughter; Crosstalk]

UP: 175 years of educating children, 1831 to 2006, Valerie Capers a brilliant star lighting the way for our students. Very beautiful!

VC: That is a lovely, yes a lovely award, you know?

IN: Do you have any photos from the affair, no?

VC: But I can call the institute. I know they do yes, I will okay.

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IN: Because it's interesting the continuity, so they do stay in touch with you, a renowned graduate?

VC: Yes, yes, they, they, they, they're wonderful. You know they appreciate my efforts such as they are here.

IN: This is beautiful.

UP: So what about your education at Julliard, how was that?

VC: Well that was, that was so interesting.

IN: Were you prepared?

VC: Oh, are you kidding? Having come from the institute? Absolutely. Actually I'll tell you--.

IN: So many students say they think they're prepared until they get there.

VC: Yes, the first, the first 2 or 3 years of music theory and all those courses I took, I really didn't have to take them because I had done all of that in high school.

IN: Did you test out?

VC: No, I didn't, listen they gave me the test I answered the questions and I don't know why they didn't test me out, actually I'm glad they didn't because you know even though I knew, I would say even though I knew about 90% of everything, there are things you do pick up. And then I was, then I had a chance to be in class and, and, and with friends that we went to all—we, we moved on and advanced in the other sequential classes together so I then began to form a nice circle of friends, you know at the school. And--.

UP: Did you have Braille?

VC: No, well my Braille music of course I brought with me. I mean, I, I had to get, in order to learn but I was in a difficult situation now because at the institute when I studied everything was there and everything was there especially for the use of blind and visually impaired. The

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mathematical things were adding and subtracting, the, the, the shapes and examples that we had in the biology classes, the textbooks were in Braille, everything. Nothing now was in Braille, everything, everything had to be read to me. And, and of course the state at that time provided money for a reader service so it—that was a struggle, and I was taking an academic track because which means that at Julliard, yes, that's right. The Julliard offered a diploma course which would be 4 years and it would be like a music major and you wouldn't have all those academics but if you wanted to get—if you wanted to do the Bachelor's, you did it in 5 years at Julliard as opposed to 4. And so I knew that that's really what I had to do and it was hard and the only way you could really do that and be successful is if you had the cooperation of the college instructors and I must say that I never ran, never ran into any bastards. They were really good. I've heard some horror stories and, and I would say in general, I would say even then in general the, I think that the professors were kind of surprised. I never felt a sense of any of the professors feel, feeling awkward around me, or awkward having me in the class.

UP: I have a question, did you ever make anybody feel awkward?

VC: Thank you, but one of the things that I knew would help is to go in there from the get go and go in there—I think I told you about this in the other interview, and go in there mobile independent, I knew that was number one. And daddy as I said—God bless him—went with me about a week before and after I got my schedule we, you know, we went—daddy walked with me to the floors where I was going to have classes and I learned how the numbers ran and so forth and so on. And where the ladies room, rooms were I knew where at least 2 or 3 ladies rooms, water fountains, I knew those things I would need during the—library. Those would keep me going and I knew as I went along I'd start learning other things, you know, about the building

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and all--. So from the time I started nobody had to escort me to classes, they didn't have to walk around--.

UP: You never had an [inaudible]?

VC: No, no I was totally independent like I would be in my apartment and I think that that had a lot to do with.

IN: Why did you never have a dog or a cane?

VC: Very good question. I never had the dog because, now I love dogs but I never got a dog because the dog requires a great deal of attention and I just felt I didn't have the time to do that. The cane I should've started years earlier with the cane but Miss Tody advised me against it. And a—she said she didn't want me going back and forth to Julliard every day when I was starting out and I was the first blind person now to ever go to this school and only one since then, and she didn't—she knew and we would—she said she felt and she was right I guess and I knew she was, she said that you know, when a blind person travels in the street with a cane you have to be very alert. You know you take training and they teach you how judge by the sound of the traffic when you can cross and when you can't etcetera, etcetera. So you have to be ready—it take an enormous amount of energy to be alert and on top of things because you know your life depends on it. Then as a student you have a book bag full of books and carrying a lot of stuff. And it's very difficult to maneuver the, you now, book bag and the books and the cane, so forth and so on--. So I was just as glad not to have to do it to tell you the truth. I was a bit of a coward.

IN: What she, what she said there is so important because your concentration would be taken away from the music--.

VC: And from my classes and from my studies, you know? So she said you need to be, you need to be sharp, you know?



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IN: So then, how would you get to Julliard from home?

VC: I would take a cab. And you know what makes me laugh is from 1278 which was you know as I said Union Avenue between Freeman and Ritter Place, across the bridge going over to Broadway and 122<sup>nd</sup> or actually—the Julliard School is where the Manhattan School is now--. It ran from Claremont Avenue to Broadway and the front of the school was 130 Claremont Avenue, so just across the street from Grant's Tomb you know on Riverside Drive, so I would take a cap there. And, and it was a \$1.65. And I gave the cab driver 35, and then I would pray, I would pray that when we went over the 155<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge that it wouldn't be opened you know, because they [inaudible] and then I'd have to say oh could you possibly just turn the meter off you know or something? But anyway, so that's how I got back and forth.

UP: And then you would get someone--?

VC: Yes, yes, yes then one of the students would go with me to get a cab or something like that exactly.

IN: And then so would your mother be worried that you were going downtown?

VC: No, no, that's right, they weren't worried about me going in the cab. They worried when I started traveling with the cane until they got used to it, you know? But no that was, that was okay, that was okay and I would say—and what I had to do to keep on top of the game is I went to all my teachers and I said look, I said I'd appreciate it if you would just—two things—please give me assignments well in advance, I said because, I, I have to have everything read to me and so forth and I'm going—it's, it's and I have so many classes and it's going to be a struggle to keep up--.

UP: [Inaudible] tapes?

VC: I, I never took tapes in classes. I always took my notes, you know?

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UP: Right.

VC: You know, it's funny--.

UP: You took notes in Braille?

VC: Yes, yes.

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGIN SIDE B]

UP: Is that why you have all these notebooks around?

VC: Well, those notebooks that I have around, those notebooks I have around are like my music notebooks when I'm working on changes that bother me and I come up with something that's good I write it down so maybe the next time I start practicing I, I can look at those if I've forgotten what it is you know or--.

UP: Is that where you got that habit though?

VC: Yes, taking notes. Miss Butler my 6<sup>th</sup> grade—what a fabulous teacher she was, she was one of these old fashioned teachers and I had her for 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 7<sup>th</sup> grade. And I mean the things that Miss Butler taught me when I was 11 and 12, I still remember, it's ridiculous. I can, I can give you the 61 counties of New York State in, in alphabetical order. I mean crazy things, I just wish somebody would offer me \$100,000 for doing it.

UP: Do you know all the Presidents of the United States?

VC: Yes. We did all that too, you know, and, and--.

UP: We tried that in this history class I'm teaching, nobody could get past Adams.

VC: Oh, no, which one? John Quincy or the other one?

UP: Yes, I think they got, they're very [inaudible], it's Washington--.

VC: Jefferson, Madison, Monroe right.

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UP: But I mean these were—these kids are sophomores, juniors. They don't have—they never learned it. They never learned it so they don't have it.

VC: Isn't that something?

UP: Yes.

VC: So I mean she, she always said take you know, take notes and, and, and she believed in mental associations for memory. And that was a great thing because even today I remember things by, by hooking them up in some sort of mental way or logical way and it, it's fabulous. You know, it, it's just wonderful. So she—see now, I go to these computer classes and I tape the class okay. That to me is, when I come back, it is so time consuming because if I want to go through the class I've got to go through all the garbage you know? Conversations, other people asking questions, the diversions from what [inaudible].

UP: Right from the information.

VC: Right. But I learned how to take notes and I learned how to take notes and even if I was a couple of sentences or one subject behind what the teacher was saying, I knew how to divide my head so I finished up with a sentence there and could pick it up. And then the other thing I—and then the other things I asked them to please when they were writing on the board to just say what they're writing. You know, so and a couple of times the teacher would start writing, oh, oh Valerie, okay, so he would then say as he was writing and it was no big thing. But I'll tell you--.

IN: But you got no resistance about being the first blind student there?

VC: No but I think I had pressured put on me at the institute that I don't think, that I think were really unnecessary and unfortunate. Because they, you know like, they sent me out and they said now remember, you're the first blind person ever to go to the Julliard School—that's right.

IN: [Inaudible]

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VC: That's right, and, and, and--.

IN: And you were Black too, uh oh.

VC: And they said—oh my God is right—and they said and you want to make maybe a—pave the way for somebody else to go. That's a big responsibility. And they always expected me to, to do everything top notch and everything and it was—and I tried.

IN: And you did.

VC: But sometimes I didn't quite make the mark and, and, and I was really, I was really tense with it you know?

IN: Yes.

VC: So I just felt I had this extra burden apart from you know, getting around and being accepted and so forth and so on so I mean--.

UP: In the process of auditioning and being accepted it was just—they treated you like you think they treated you like any other student?

VC: Yes, yes they did, yes. And I think they were terribly, no I think they were terrible relieved when they found out that they didn't have to feed me and change my diapers, and all that sort of stuff you know?

IN: But why, why do you think that they haven't followed up with other--?

VC: Well, they did. I heard, I heard that they did have, they did admit one other person to the school on the basis, but they didn't, they didn't make the grade and that's unfortunate.

IN: You know their very high, high percentage of people who don't finish there.

VC: Yes, that's right, that's right.

IN: You know extremely--. They make it very difficult on the students.

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VC: So they didn't, they didn't—right—and they didn't make the grade because they, they, they—you know why because they didn't have educational background. They weren't equipped to hang in, you know that's right, so that's what happened, I felt bad about that.

IN: Because my son was saying, he's in graduate school, you know in Indiana in music and he was saying it doesn't matter if you have a degree, you know a college degree if you come in the Master's they test you plenty of people with degrees in music don't pass those entrance exams.

VC: That's right, that's true.

IN: Because they are pushing on such a high level that really once you pass exams the level of the work isn't as high as the entrance exams.

VC: That's true, that's true yes.

IN: You know, but the theory and that--. He feels like they have a way of protecting what's in classical music.

VC: It's very Euro-centric yes. Whatever they ask you and what they--.

IN: They make this level really higher than a lot of them can reach and you know he said it really keeps people out who would get so much out of it.

VC: That's right, that's right. There you go, there you go, exactly.

IN: That really don't have that background but have something else that they could really add to that music.

VC: Exactly, you got it.

[Crosstalk]

IN: I believe I heard that conversation 40 years ago.

VC: Yes, that's right, that's right.

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IN: So, that, that's a problem I don't know how it can be fixed but that's a problem we see. So what—tell me about when you started working professionally.

VC: Okay--.

IN: Does that cross with going to Julliard?

VC: It actually—my working really came post-Julliard you know? I didn't even work during the summers because it was the summertime that I had to take time out to learn repertoire for the following year. What happened is I would meet with my teacher at the end of the year--.

UP: Did you have the teacher from Julliard?

VC: Yes, oh yes, oh yes, yes in fact when you go to Julliard one of the things you put on the application is with whom would you like to study?

[Crosstalk]

VC: That's right and I kept my fingers crossed, hoping that I would get Mister Fraughnlic and I did. And so the thing is that—and you'll laugh, you know when you go into the movies—I was such a naïve child and it's so funny. When you go in the movies and they have these teachers, great pianists and teachers like—they always have the European accents, you know and all that stuff. And I remember the day Mister Fraughnlic called me up, I couldn't believe, and I hung up the phone, I said daddy he's American, he talks like us.

[Laughter]

VC: I expected an [inaudible], accent or something like that but that's right or something like that.

IN: Austrian.

VC: So anyway, what I would do is to talk to him because once the year started, I mean I had sociology I had psychology and history, I had English, I had literature courses and their was

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no—and then the music, the theory classes, piano lit courses, theater courses, musical theater courses, you know the opera and everything. I had, I had no time to learn anything. You know because remember like to learn something my first step is memorization. So you can't read Braille and play the piano at the same time.

[Laughter]

UP: First you memorize it then you play it?

VC: That's correct. And the funniest thing about it is, if it's a piece that you know and love and have heard all your life when you memorize it the memorization moves that much faster. But there was no time, there was no way I could take time out of anything to memorize because I really needed all day, all night, every day to memorize with nothing else to do. So that's what happened, I had nothing else to do and so I didn't even work during the summer. Well that's not true I worked one summer in the afternoons they gave me a job at the institute and they even let me stay in the women's housing facility and I could practice all day long. When I wanted to. But—so that's what I did. I, I learned everything during the summer. I couldn't even—and I had to make sure I learned what I needed because if something came up and I had to learn something else I still wouldn't have a chance to. So that's one of the reasons why I could never participate in a concerto competition, I would've loved to have played with the orchestra or at least tried out for it, but I couldn't do that because they didn't post the concertos that they would have the competitions for until September when you went back to school and there was no time, you know there was no time.

UP: Somebody's trying to--.

VC: No, they're just, no they're just leaving a message.

[Crosstalk; Break in the Tape]

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UP: This is a great shot of Valerie.

IN: She looks good?

UP: This is a fantastic shot.

[Crosstalk]

IN: The only reason I let her have me on camera is because she—we have to [inaudible]. All the other interviews [inaudible]. So I was asking about what you did in the summer when you started your professorship.

VC: Yes, as I said--.

IN: Could you say again about why you never performed concerto?

VC: Okay, I never performed concertos at Julliard because during the summer I would have to learn my whole repertoire because that was the only time that I had a substantial amount of space in my life to memorize and to get the pieces that I needed for the—we always had to have pieces representative of each particular classical period. And we had to have them and prepare them for the, you know the juries at the end of the year. So in September the school would post which concerti they were going to have for the competition. And of course by the time I got to school in September and checked the list out, if it wasn't a concerto I learned, I couldn't participate and it never was. I actually learned very few concerti in my life and there's a good reason for it because Miss Tody felt that I should, that I should be you know concentrating most of my time and energy on playing the pieces that I would be able to perform as a solo pianist in concert. You know by preparing concertos, if I don't do them with the orchestra, the only time I can do them is with a second piano. And that's all well and good but in the mean time, I could be, you know learning more Brahms or more Chopin or more Beethoven which I could play in concert so that's why I never really got into playing a concerti.



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IN: Did you ever perform any 2 piano pieces?

VC: Not 2 piano pieces written for 2 piano, but I did have the opportunity of playing concertos with, with a second piano playing the orchestra part and I did have an opportunity a couple of times to play a concerto with orchestra which was wonderful, that was a very special experience.

IN: I love that. I love that 2 piano when the second piano plays the orchestra.

VC: Oh yes, it's wonderful.

IN: Do they do that often?

VC: No, because most times when the professional pianist is playing a concerto they'll play with an orchestra yes.

IN: I love that though.

VC: Yes, it is, it's fun, it's fun.

IN: So when did you begin to perform professionally?

VC: I would say--.

UP: I began to perform professionally--.

VC: I'm sorry, ask me the question one more time?

IN: When did you begin to perform professionally?

VC: Well, I began to perform professionally--.

[Laughter]

UP: One more time--.

VC: I began to perform professionally, I would say maybe about my third year or so at the Julliard School. Now as a kid and as a teenager I was always putting concerts and programs together with my cousins and with my brother and one of the big things I did was to put on a variety show at the institute which was a spectacular event and got lots of press. And we did a lot

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of wonderful things, so I always liked putting shows together and I always liked performing. But my first real professional concert was at the Salem Methodist Church in Harlem. And it was sponsored by the Phyllis Wheatley Club, Grandma Capers was a member, Loula Roach, Grandma's best friend they were members of it and so I—they made it possible for me to do my very first classical concert, and that was, that was so exciting. And after that, I'll tell you this, the churches of Harlem kept me busy because all during those last couple of years of going to Julliard I got invited to all sorts of teas and events where I could go in and play a little bit you know and I took advantage of it.

UP: Do you know anything about the Phyllis Wheatley Club?

[Break in the Tape]

VC: Because my Grandma Capers who could've passed for—was wild about Marcus Garvey I understand. And at one time in her young life she wanted to go off on the boat to Africa, as he was going to do it. I mean Grandma Capers was something. So I mean, I guess I did know a couple of people but I didn't know enough. You know what I realized—I got out of school, I didn't know about Sojourner Truth and you know I was in Julliard and nobody for example, what's that Pushkin, Pushkin, Alexander Pushkin the Russian—Pushkin is to Russian literature what Shakespeare is to English literature. Nobody ever said anything about him having, I think it was an African father, nobody said a word about that. And if you read the, you know, the 3 Musketeers, nobody said anything about Alexander—I mean they are so sneaky, they won't tell you anything. You know they won't give you—and this I find very interesting. You go to Europe, and you—I think I have one of them pictures over there—you go to Europe and you see pictures of Beethoven, Beethoven has a much darker, swarthier complexion, he has kinky hair, he Negroid lips so to speak. And there's a lot of discussion, or a lack of discussion if you will,

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about his, his ancestry. And I remember one day in class, and there was a Everet Storyman, and he—I wasn't particularly fond of him, but he, he was teaching the master class of piano literature and he was a man who knew like, Anton Weber and Schoenberg and stuff—he made the first recordings of these people's music and stuff like that. And somebody said something about Beethoven and asked something about, you know, following the lineage of Beethoven or something like that, and that they'd heard blah, blah, blah was such and such the case, blah, blah, blah and Mister Storyman's answer was he did not wish to discuss it. And I said, mhm, you know, when he said that my head said mhm, I bet he doesn't, you know? So I said, well the world will never give; will never give Black folks Beethoven. They'll never do it.

IN: They won't give them Alexander Hamilton either.

VC: There you go, there you go. See what I mean, it's, it's unbelievable.

IN: So okay, we're back to your professional—Salem Baptist Church, do you know where that is?

VC: That's right, Methodist, I think it's around 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 129<sup>th</sup> Street.

IN: We can check.

VC: And that was my first professional, you know concert.

IN: Meaning you got paid?

VC: Yes, I got paid.

IN: And when you did the concerts in the churches in between--?

VC: Yes, and I picked up a little change that's right. And when I graduated--.

IN: A social that's what it's called right?

VC: Yes, the social, there you go--.

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IN: That's what I want to have a social, I want to have a social, a tea and a social with your students.

VC: Okay, all right.

IN: And we'll serve tea and we'll have you know the scones and the thing--.

VC: Okay, all right.

IN: And we'll have, you know, a conversation about you and your teaching.

VC: That would be terrific, okay, sounds great, sounds wonderful, thank you. So I mean do you want to know anything about my working now--.

[Laughter]

IN: Thank you Valerie.

[Crosstalk]

VC: That's right tell her Dawn. Well I told you my [inaudible]. I graduated, I graduated from Julliard in '59 okay, now I went back to Julliard for a Master's Degree. I was, you were supposed to really take the Master's in 2 years but I was able to, I finished a lot of my undergraduate academics before I graduated so I was able to take some graduate level academics and so with that accomplished I was able to get my Master's Degree in 1 year. Now here I was, I was out of Julliard and I had a Bachelor's Degree and a Master's Degree and I couldn't get a job. And at that time you couldn't get one in a public school, I didn't have—I also at that time didn't have a, a you know the, the license or anything like that. And so here I was, I was going to figure out how I would be able to get into college or get into a school. I started teaching privately for a little bit and then Elias Tattenbaum, who is a wonderful American composer who was at the Manhattan School of Music for many years. He's since retired. He married my high school theory teacher and he was teaching at a little neighborhood music school in The Bronx, Cruger

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Avenue, 2814 Cruger Avenue as a matter of fact, I think it's probably—it was a private house and probably has families living in it now. So Eli said I'd love to get you at this school, so I think I told you this, he spoke to Miss Kleinfeld about it—Esther Kleinfeld and they, you know, as I said I, I give her a lot of credit, she was very brave, she decided she wanted to try it. She wanted hire me on the basis of what Eli told her about me. She said she, you know, had a little apprehension because she didn't know how the children would react to a blind teacher and she wasn't sure how the parents would react but there was never a problem. The kids were wonderful, the parents accepted it, it—there was just no problem. And I was very grateful for that job so—and here I was at the Julliard, coming out of the Julliard School with the 2 degrees and I was making \$2.50 an hour and glad to make it.

UP: And what kind of students?

VC: Oh, I had theory students, I had classic theory students and private piano students as well. So, you know--.

IN: What kind of neighborhood was that?

VC: It was, it was, it was kind of—I would say it was a middle class neighborhood. All houses, all residential in that area.

IN: In what area of The Bronx was that?

VC: Now that's, let me see—Cruger Avenue, it's—when you go north on Cruger Avenue go towards the school, it's, it's kind of east of White Plains Road, it's kind of getting up near the Williamsbridge and not quite to—Williamsbridge is a little further over you know? Eastwise. But, excuse me, or Gun Hill Road, White Plains or Gun Hill Road. So I, so I worked there and it all, if you know, it was, it was wonderful you know you didn't, it was by the hour and so forth and no medical coverage. Nothing like that. But I was so glad to have the job because it gave me

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a little bit of independence. And then I started to take some pride in the students. But lo and behold what happened is that in 1971, I guess, 1970 there was so much hullabaloo at the, in the City Universities about affirmative action. That's why—people against it and people for it and I've always been for it because I never would've gotten my opportunity had it not been for affirmative action. Someone who knew me said that they thought, that they, they were going to recommend me and see if I could possible get a job—they needed, they needed an adjunct and so what happened is that I was interviewed by the Chamber Department and it turns out we had a couple of mutual friends, Doctor Salzberg, and he—so he said well I think we ought to try this and we'll just see what happens and he assigned me some evening classes. That was my first—I had 2 evening classes twice a week and that was in the a, that was in the fall of 1970 and that went so well that in the, the second semester, the spring semester of 1971, the chairman called me in and said you know, this department has 1 assistant professor line left and he said and I'd like to see you get it. So then we started working on all the stuff to, to get me in as an assistant professor so I did and then in 1971, in the spring of—when it was over I became an assistant professor and I started the fall of 1971 as an assistant professor. And then what happened is that after 1978, the year that I did, the year that I did, *The Thing About Love*, that was produced by George Weave and you know all sorts of things I was doing and so forth and so on. The chairman called me out of my class one day and said did you apply for an associate's degree? Now you know, I'm so dumb I figured assistant professor was the end of it you know, and I don't play the part. I said no, he said you've got—he said you've got, you've got 2 days to get it all together. And I called my friend up Ruth and I said Ruth you got to help me, we have, we have 48 hours to get all this stuff and it's got to be done in 14 copies and everything. Well we got it together and because of the articles and the recording at the concerts and all those things that I

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had done I was promoted to associate professor. And then finally in 1987, so in '79 I became an associate professor and in 1987 my—chairman again was getting ready to leave said I think we ought to try for, full professor. He said now that's not so easy to get because he said, we have people with doctorates that don't have full professorships. And of course, being a female they don't give it to us as quickly as they give it to a male you know? And I hate to say that but that's true and it's still true with the universities. Just like, we fight so hard to get equal pay with the men, you know in the institutions, so anyway, I worked on that and thank God that was after the Dizzy at Redondo Beach. So someone called me and said they had gotten this tape of Dizzy and it was down at J&R so I had to go before my, my peers the chairs and the deans and everything and we ran down. I told J&R to hold that last copy of they had of that Dizzy thing and we ran downtown and got, got the copy and I had everything to submit and I remember my, my chairman said now what you've got to do is overwhelm them, you know just have to-- So I mean I went in with everything, programs that I had, premiere of works that I'd had where I'd also hired former Bronx Community College music majors, you know? So they were so happy about that and so forth so then in '87 I became, again I think it was '87, '87 or '86 I became full professor and then shortly, '87 later that year I became chairman of the department, so that's how-- So I did work myself up from the ranks from the very beginning through, through the, you know through the ranks—from adjunct to full professor and then I became chairman of the department. And I—I was, I was so grateful and so happy to, to do the work. I'm very proud of what I've done at Bronx Community College because when I first went in I taught, I taught the music appreciation slash history courses and then at that time since we had a music department, I had private students. I didn't have any of the theory classes at the time, private students. And then I taught the piano class where they had those electronic pianos, you know and then maybe 8

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or 10 people can study piano at the same time. So that went along well, but then I felt a real need to bring African American music into the, into the college and so I proposed to the curriculum committee all of the courses that became part of the music department curriculum. We had Introduction to Improvisation I, and Introduction to Improvisation II, we had Slow Jazz Improvisation, Jazz History. I brought into the curriculum for the classes, Latin Jazz Ensemble, I brought into the history classes and composition. And this was a composition class that was not, this was a composition class that was not, I would say Euro-centric in its, in its spirit because I wasn't teaching them how to write rondeaus or sonatas or, or things like that. But rather, [inaudible] or things like that, but rather I was teaching them how to, how to compose songs and how to arrange and how to know the different forms and structures of the songs that they composed and the songs that they hear sung by other artists. And that, and, and realizing too that they were more based in jazz and, and rhythm and blues and this is where they could apply those things that they were learning. They learned all the things that they had to know that would apply to writing, I mean, when you learned about chord progressions and how chords are constructed it doesn't matter whether you're talking about a chord in a Thelonious Monk tune or a chord in a Ravel piece, you know? If you're talking about a chord that has ninths or elevenths or thirteenth in it, you're talking about the same things, so that applies to somebody who's dealing with jazz or any of those related musics as it does to anybody who's dealing with the Euro-centric. And I just hate it when these colleges offer these courses and they say jazz harmony, you know? As opposed to, you know, classical harmony, or Euro-centric harmony. Harmony is harmony, harmony just becomes different based on what period you're talking about or who is doing it, what composer or arranger is doing it, you know? I mean so, so I worked very hard—and, and, and tried to do, brought, brought people up to the school, Tito Puente and, and, and Frank Foster



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and people like Max Roach and [inaudible] and Dizzy and James Moody. And we, I, I, I started, I started, what we call the Hall of Great Americans, Salute to Jazz, an annual thing—it started in 1988 I believe and our first guest was, was Dizzy and so we had—we put together a jazz band, I used the Latin Jazz Ensemble of the school and we brought in ringers and of course all the people like, you know, Bob Steward and Joe Daily, I mean just cream of the crop guys. Randy Eckert and all these guys and so we had—so we brought them, so we had a regular 19 or 20 piece band when these guys came and we played, we played arrangements of people in the band and people in the Latin Jazz Ensemble and, and like when Dizzy came we had these wonderful arrangements of these tunes and things like this and he was just—he was just knocked out. So we did this, we did this every year and the year—the year, yes the year that Dizzy came I had 2 young people who played saxophone, and they, they were in the high school in The Bronx and I had them come up and and join us like in the—in a blues you know so that they had a chance to play with the big band and with Dizzy which was such a kick for them, you know and their families. So we were constantly, constantly working on, on, on things like that to make the—to make the, the jazz music and the interesting jazz alive on the campus. And, and I, I this is what I brought to the school and as I said I'm very proud of it. And there are, so many, so many people that are out performing that were my students and I just—Allen Givens who's now teaching out in Uniondale, Missouri, he's my regular saxophone and flute player with my group. John Robertson with whom I'm playing was a student of mine. He was writing concertos for saxophone and orchestra and chamber music and stuff and I realized he's such, a gifted student, he was one of my students—Vincent Polleza, Pete Naders, Pete Naders with the Harlem Orchestra now you know? And travels all over the world and Sheryl Gadsden and Olive, Olive Guiles and Michael—these are all people that, that are performing, they live out in, they live out

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in New Jersey and they—Olive and Sheryl do back up work, studio singing work and do things like that and they-- I mean my students are just all over the place. Sharon Freeman for example who was not a student at—my brother's second wife—wasn't a student of mine at the college—at the Bronx Community College, she was a student of mine at Manhattan School of Music, you know? So I mean I have—I have people who were, you know, who where under my, my tutelage all over the place and I'm so proud of them, you know? I'm really, I'm really proud of that and I'm just, I'm just proud of what I could do as a teacher that I've always been a good teacher—been one of my strong points and I think, and again I think that a lot of success, particularly in the area of improvisation, a lot of my success was due to the difficulties I had—I think I've told you about them in a former interview, due to the difficulties I had learning to improvise myself. You know and that was, that was a going through the hell fires and so getting that together and then being able to transfer it to other students was, very important to me. I mean, and what I loved being about at Bronx Community College was that they gave me, they gave me room to do some of the things I wanted to do artistically. I had to fight with the administration of course, about getting money to do this and to do that but, if I had an idea that I wanted to do, I always had the opportunity pretty much most of the time, most of the time to do it. So it was very, it was very satisfying, it was very exciting and as I said, one of the—and you know I really put myself into the teaching. I can't do things halfway so to speak, and I think that, I think that my teaching over the years was a retardant to my, my artistic development as a performer because I wasn't out there trying to get gigs number one and I wasn't out there really playing and I was trying to keep my job together. When I met John, that was a big breakthrough for me because as a student what I, I did was I made my approach to him, I said listen you play cello, he wasn't playing much bass then, would you be willing to play bass cello with me, I need someone to practice and

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I'll pay you for it and so forth and so on, I needed to try to get myself together. And he did and then stopped and decided well why do this on the cello, I'll do it on the bass. So that's how John and I first got started together and I started working and to try to get my, get my hand together and do—to get my confidence up because everything, you know, day and night, I mean everything, all the—all the energy was going into the teaching and going into the other students and I had—I couldn't do it kind of half way, I just couldn't and it took up all my time. So I had very little time, to, to, to work the way a piano player should work and an artist should work at their craft. So, I—I guess I've always been a late bloomer so here I am at this point, this is the first time in my life since I left the school in early retirement, it's the first time in my life that I've had an opportunity to concentrate on what I need to do for myself you know? And--.

IN: When did you take the early retirement?

VC: I took the early—it's really I don't know why I get—I think I took the early retirement in 1996, I think that was the early retirement I took, the year I took it.

IN: Did you know Dizzy before you hired him to come up?

VC: Oh, yes.

IN: How did you know him?

VC: Let me tell you, let me see how'd I first meet Dizzy? If this is not the first time, it's one of the earliest times. I know, I know when—yes I first met Dizzy, Dizzy grew up with, with John Motley in Cheraw, South Carolina. Do you know John Motley at all?

IN: Yes.

VC: Yes, well John Motley was the biggest thing, in, in public school, public school music in the '70s, there wasn't anybody bigger. He was the director of the All City Chorus. And the All City Chorus before John got it had been lead by and directed by Wilhousky, I can't remember his first

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name and Wilhousky is one of the greatest names in choral writing. People like Wilhousky and Doctor Ross, Hugh Ross, they were people that were consulted by—oh gosh, they were people that were consulted by Toscanini and people like that when they had to talk about diction and choral singing and all sorts of things like that. But it was coup when John, an African American, got that post. And I mean he, he was the top person, Lindsey gave him—should I stop for a second Dawn? Should we close the door or something?

[Crosstalk; Break in Interview]

IN: Did you know Father O'Brien?

VC: I hope he would remember me I did, at Kennedy Center they had a big program on Mary Lou and it was funny, I was the only one on the stage, and I love her but I was the only one on the stage who had not met her so you know, so it was--. Right it was so interesting, I talked to Mary Lou and I thought to myself, oh God, now when it comes my turn—everybody's—had personal contact with her, so I said well, make that to your advantage and because then they would talk about her [inaudible] or whatever, so I said well—so then I started by saying I'm the only one on stage who personally met Mary Lou, you know, I never had any personal performing musical contacts with her, I said but let me tell you what she meant to me and how she influenced the work I did, you know and so forth and so on. So I got out of that one all right.

IN: She's fabulous, fabulous, fabulous. So okay, Dizzy Gillespie, we're going--.

VC: John and Dizzy, John and Dizzy grew up Cheraw and they knew each other well. And they had lost contact with one another and this one particular night, John was doing a national hook-up. At the end of the year they had a spring concert with the, All City Orchestra and the All City Chorus and CBS was, was presenting about an hour of it and Dizzy happened to be in Boston and saw John and rushed to contact him the next day and found him and they hadn't seen each

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other in and talked to each other and that was the beginning of Dizzy and John doing different things together for quite some time. And then, you know, I got to know Dizzy through that and one afternoon John brought Dizzy up to my house, I was in 1818 Anthony Avenue, brought him up for lunch and my mother got all excited about it. She fixed [inaudible] the kind of things Dizzy liked and so we— you know so she fixed the stuff, she wasn't there for the lunch but she had everything there and it was John Robinson, my friend, and John Motley and myself, and Dizzy and we just had a wonderful time and he had been--.

UP: What'd she cook?

VC: You know it was, it was a bunch of healthy stuff because when I was in Redondo Beach with Dizzy he ordered food that was enough for 2 people and was—and he had everything from crawfish to, to pancakes, to grits, he had all this stuff in 1 meal at breakfast, I said now how is this man going to eat all this stuff? But anyway, bean salad, and this thing and that thing and all kinds of things and he really liked, I'm sorry sometimes I forget, you know?

IN: No, no it's not that you have to remember what he ate, but I always like to ask people, because sometimes people remember what they ate, it doesn't matter if you don't.

VC: Yes, that's true. But anyway so we had a wonderful time and so much so--.

IN: You were still living at your parents'?

VC: No I had my own apartment in the same building that my parents were in. 1818 Anthony Avenue, right. It's just up the road. Right, so okay, you know so, after like when I, when I produced, when I produced my own album I had asked Dizzy, I said you know would you give me quote, you know so I can put it on the record? It was the first album I had done, Affirmation. And he did and then a couple of times when I was going to do something and I asked Dizzy what he'd do and he said, absolutely, and he never let me down, you know I had his home number. I

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could always call him. And John Motley said, now just play up to Lorraine because she can be a fitz when you call her. Be real nice to her, you know and so forth, so I was, I was always nice to Lorraine, you know because she was, she could get kind of tough, she wouldn't let you talk to Dizzy if she didn't want you to or--. She was so nice to me and I've always made it a point to be polite and ask how she was, you know, and all that sort of stuff so Dizz, so he—so you know, and I was so shocked when I got invited to go to Redondo Beach, you know to do that, that Jazz in America thing with him. I was so excited, I was so flattered that I—you know that he asked me to go. And my Sing About Love, the, the performance at Carnegie Hall in '78, Dizzy was going to do it and I asked him would he do it? And he said yes, and he said but I'm going to Europe and he said I'm supposed to be back a day or so before that—but he didn't get back in time so that's why he wound up not doing it. But so when I became chairman of the department I called him and I said Dizz, I'm, I'm chairman of the department now and I'm trying to establish a, a, you know and annual, you know, Salute to Jazz, American Hall of Fame, Salute to Jazz it's on the campus, I said it's a national, you know, a landmark and I would like kick it off with you and I was wondering if you'd be willing to do it. He said absolutely, so we set the time and I want to tell you that, the school sent for a car for Dizzy about 11:30, or 12 o'clock or so and he stayed with us, he was there until—he got there before I got there. And I was going to have everything set up in the President's Office because I knew that was a slicker place, he was in my old messy office with all the books—he got there—and they had set up with the, they had all kinds of breakfast stuff and some of the musicians were already there. I said what're you doing here, I was going to get them in the President's Office, he said no I want to be here with the people, you know. So he ate with us, sat with us—then that was about maybe 10:30, 11, then we went over to the hall at 1 o'clock and we had a rehearsal and that was thrilling because he

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conducted the rehearsal and I remember—[inaudible] reminds me of this sometimes when I offer some advice you know? And he says well you're not always right you know? So I said to John—we were playing around midnight or something—and I said John I think you ought to be—blah, blah, blah, so anyway when we finished around midnight Dizzy walked over to John and he said hey man, you know he said, I love your playing he said and what you doing around about midnight—he said just remember even with the implications of it being up, it's still a ballad man, it's still a ballad. So John said he learned a lot from that you know? And so--.

[Crosstalk]

IN: Did you get that in Spain or--?

VC: John brought that to me back from his first trip to Spain.

IN: It's beautiful. I love flamenco dancing.

VC: Thank you. Isn't it wonderful, it's just wonderful? One of these times I'll take you to my messy bedroom and show you my family on my hutch and all the different little souvenirs I have from the places I've traveled, you know?

[Crosstalk]

VC: You guys collect pictures, I collect like little model replicas of things when I go places.

IN: Yes because then you can--.

VC: I can feel it, that's right, I can feel it.

IN: Very nice, very nice. So okay, did we talk about how much we love Dizzy Gillespie, yes we did.

VC: Yes, yes

IN: Tell me about when you traveled, the first time you traveled out of The Bronx or out of New York. Traveled abroad or--?

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VC: I can tell you maybe, I can tell you about the first time I traveled abroad if you want? You mean, just as a sightseer or just as a--?

IN: That's what I wanted to know, did you work or did you go as a sightseer?

VC: No, the first time I went to Europe I went as a sightseer you know? And that was--.

IN: Is it common for a person, unsighted person to say sightseeing?

VC: Yes, we say we go to the movies, I saw that movie, you know I heard that television program--.

[END OF SIDE B; END OF TAPE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 2; SIDE A]

[Crosstalk]

IN: So who'd you go with?

VC: I went with, I went with a girlfriend a girl that I grew up--. Very nice but in many ways it was a mistake. Because we are—very nice person but it was just the 2 of us and she was kind of a scaredy cat about things and she just wouldn't do a lot--. Can you imagine spending your last day in Paris, it's a beautiful sun shiny day, you go out for a minute and just walk, walk for a few minutes and you come back and then you just sit in the sitting room of this little boarding house where we were staying until it's about—5 o'clock when you go to the train to travel, you know to go to the next place you're going to go. I was—she didn't want to go up in the Eiffel Tower, I wanted to, to go to the Eiffel Tower, she didn't want to do that and then she, she just was scared of things, you know, when I, when I travel and I go sightseeing I'm, I'm active, I'm active every minute you know? So that was—I think that was a kind of mistake and we went a lot of interesting places because the librarian at my school who was a free spirit, she passed away about 10 years ago in her 90s. She was one of—she got married in her, she got married in her



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late 60s and had a marriage that lasted about 16 years. She climbed all the steps of the Tibetan Temple in her, in her, in her 80s, she knew Mother Teresa, when Mother Teresa was in India and even when this—and she used to travel on, on steamers, on tram steamers you know. And she, even in her 90s the men adored her. She had to beat them off at her feet, I mean they loved this woman. What she had I don't know, but I mean, I loved her, I adored her because she was fun and she was adventurous and, and, and, and when I was a teenager, she was just the opposite from the, from the strict rule of thumb that Ms. Tody had me under you know? I loved, Lisa, that's her name, she, you know I would meet her in secret, or she would lend me a key so I could get in the building and practice an extra hour when the building was ordinarily locked or when I wanted—I remember when I wanted to go see Stan Kenton, I got tickets and we went to see that on a Sunday night and, and she brought me back to the—you know we came back to the institute and I remember the door was locked and we couldn't get in and trying to figure out how I was going to get myself back in the dormitory by morning you know? So I mean we had such good times together and she, she was, as I said, she, she was, she was a free spirit and I don't know why I mentioned--? So when she would make these trips she would come and then during the year she would give assembly talks and they were wonderful because the talks might last 2 weeks. We had an assembly every day and there'd be a program, we'd sing a hymn, they'd read a scripture, you know just like the real, you know, WASPY School would do yes. And then there'd be a program, there'd be announcements that you needed to know and stuff. She talked about her travels and it was so fabulous when she talked about her travels. I knew, this particular trip she'd gone, I knew that I had to go to Barcelona. I knew that I had to go to Majorca, I haven't gotten there yet. I knew that I wanted to go to Morocco. She, she just, it was, it was just something and so Anne wanted to go to Paris and England. I said well let's stay awhile and I said

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let's go to Spain, we'll go to Barcelona and I, and I said then we could go to Morocco and stuff like that. So we did that and you know, it was, it was wonderful going, going to Barcelona and it was what she talked about the Ramblas where they have the chairs and the birds in the cages and it was just—and, and I remember her saying that when she went from France to Spain that she traveled through the Pyrenees Mountains and that the train would just stop, you'd go just a few minutes and the train would stop at another little village where you could get off—she'd just get off anywhere, she could speak fluent Spanish. So she'd get off anywhere and stay, we were riding through the mountains and through these villages to, to go from, to go from Barcelona down to Madrid. So anyway it was just like, you know, riding that train, I remembered some of the details that she talked about. But it was her adventures, that, that made me—because that was a, that was my first trip to Europe you know? And that was a little unusual just for a first trip. But it was, it was inspired by this wonderful, wonderful woman.

IN: Did you perform in Europe?

VC: No.

IN: You've never performed--?

VC: No wait a minute I take that back. Yes I have. No I, I, I did perform but—Dizzy was in London at the time. And we were in London and he invited, we went—I called him I said I'm in London, he said come to, what's the name of that--?

IN: Ronnie--.

VC: Yes, Ronnie Scott's that's right. So I went there and, he invited me, he invited me to come up and play, you know myself and then, I played some things and then I played with him so, that, that's what happened in that trip. But as far as performing the only 2 places I've performed in Europe is, is France. And one was the Grand Parade du Jazz, and the other one was the Festival

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in Nantes and that was, that was, that was quite, that was quite an experience. That was, I did that one in Nantes just—and then I did something in Canada a while back, several years ago. But the one in Nantes was wonderful because I was, they had, they had people from everywhere and I did 3 concerts. I did, I did, the quintet, the ensemble concert, instrumental concert and then I did a second instrumental concert and then Sunday night I did an all vocal concert and it was wonderful. It was a great success. And I worked very hard all during the year. My, one of my dearest friends Mary Feinsinger who is fluent in French and stuff, I, I worked with her, I worked with her before I went to Nantes, so that I could talk to the audience in French. And I did my whole concert in French with the exception of one segment—I mean I sang the songs in English of course---. Except in one segment where I wanted to talk about something and I just didn't have quite enough vocabulary. They all thought I could speak fluent French when I got off the States, they bombarded me I didn't know what the hell was going on you know? So it was really—it was, it was really wild and then Mary did a lovely thing for me. I have a little segment in there I called, Les Toissan and it was a salute to 3 women that you could sort of associate with Paris and one was of course Josephine Baker, and one was Edith Piaf, A.D. Piaf and the other one was the Kitso, [inaudible], and the audience joined in and answered me when I was singing and I when I was there---. And then I did the 2 loves, you know, about her 2, the 2 cities you know that she loved, you know she loved—the Baker. And it was wonderful when I mentioned her name and everything, the audience applauded for her, they still love her you know? And then the Edith Piaf I was not going to do Je ne regrette, because I mean, you know, nobody does it like she does, I just said—but what I did was I got Mary Feinsinger to translate for me into French Jerome Kern's song, "The Last Time I Saw Paris". Because the history of that is that when the Nazis, you know walked into Paris and the French government fell in 1940 for a lot of people it looked

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like there was really going to be the end of Western civilization as we knew it. I mean imagine the Nazi's taking over France and you know goose stepping down the Champs Elysee and, now I think I read this article where the State Department of somebody asked Jerome Kern could he just write some positive song, some song about Paris that would have, that would have the nostalgia of what Paris has always been to us in this darkest hour of their existence. And he wrote "The Last Time I Saw Paris" and Mary wrote a wonderful translation and I had a guy who was in the diplomatic office there in Western France who was at the concert who came to me and said that was wonderful I've never heard that piece done like that. I said well she did the translation, it was really—there wasn't a dry eye in the place you know so--? It was wonderful, it was, it was exciting. I had a wonderful time and I would love to do that again. When Mary and I went to Europe 2 years ago we went to Italy this time, because I said I have to be in Venice before it disappears. And I had the most fabulous time in Venice, and then, we went to Florence. Now Florence, everybody loves it. Florence for me, not being able to see, is like being in any other city. You know, it's a city. Now, I understand that you have to see, to really understand the, the glory of the Renaissance period in Florence. I mean the buildings, the cathedrals, I mean I can't see any of that, I'm just on another city street, you know? But Mary, but Mary she was wonderful, she described things so—I remember walking down the street, when she said come over here, she said feel this, this is the side of a, of a church, she said how does that wall feel? I said it feels weather beaten and worn down she said this is 700 AD, she said that's a long time. And then she would walk over to the, to the to doors, she said now this is how these doors look in Florence, all over the place, you know, highly ornate with the animal heads and the angels and the wings and the scriptures and all this—she said it's all over, she said you see it everywhere. She said that's what Florence is all about. And so, we even went to the Statue of David because I

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told her I said you have to see David. And she said, I don't care if I see David, I said, no, no, I said you can't be in Florence and not see--. I said I can't see him and I insist we go and see him, you know so--. So anyway, she was so funny. Now she took the time when we were there. And he's elevated so because crazy tried to chop his foot off years ago, so he's elevated so there was no hope in me even being able to touch him or anything. But she said it's just incredible to see that, you know, the sinews and the muscles of his body and so forth, and she said he's got the cutest little ass she said you know?

[Laughter]

VC: As we walked around the back of him. But she took the time, Maxine for example, she took the time to show me how David, how he was standing, you know with his foot like this and the other foot in front and his hand down here and this one up like this, so I really had a feeling like with my imagination that I was seeing, I knew what she was seeing, you know? Now, so and she was one of a kind—the Tower of Pisa, yes we climbed all the way up to the top, all the way. Now Mary had polio when she was a little girl and we laugh about it, because Mary said they came up with the vaccine too late for me. You know? I said yes, I know the doctors tell me if they had the antibiotics when I lost my sight I wouldn't be in this situation. Then we start to laugh you know? I said how did we get so lucky, you know, so picture Mary with her thing. She has a leg that doesn't work but she's got this Canadian club, Canadian cane rather which has a cuff and you put your hand in—and that thing, I'm telling you she could, she could walk as much and as long as I did. But when we went to bed at night she was gone. She was gone before I could set my hair and get into bed. She was exhausted. But we started with the group but they were going too fast, we couldn't keep up—Mary says I cant—I said to hell with it. I said we're not going to—we can climb these stairs without being in that group. You know? So I have to tell

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you, the first part of climbing up there, I got scared because I stumbled and I almost fell

backwards and I said my God there's no banisters if you fall backwards on these steps you'll get a concussion and you'll kill yourself. You know, so here's Mary now, you know who has the physical problem, I thought I can't do this, she said but you wanted to go to the--? I was scared and you know what scared me? I thought, when I was in France for the festival back there we were staying in this house and there was this little narrow staircase that you go from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and when you were going upstairs you had to hug the staircase but don't go near that because the other side didn't have a railing and if you were too close you'd fall right down to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. And I don't know why I kept thinking that there was a space, I imagined in my mind. It was all in my mind that there was a space between the right and stair and the wall there, I said I can't. She said what are you afraid of? I'm afraid of maybe falling through the cracks. She said, stick your foot out. Stick your right foot out, push it over. Well there was nothing there. The step was right against the wall. It was just my imagination. I said okay, let's go you know so we did and the, how I balanced myself, the staircase is so narrow, you know, so I just flat, put my palms on and balanced myself and we walked up--. We were halfway up and the guard said you don't want to go all the way up there do you? You can—why don't you look out one of the balcony off this level here. You can see it. I said it's not the same we want to go all the way up. And then we met people coming down and they said you're really going to go to the top? And we said yes, they said well if you make it, it's well worth it. Well we did make it and it was wonderful being way up in there at the top of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. I couldn't believe it. And the bell was there, it was huge, it must weigh a couple tons, and I was able to feel the writing on it, and it's good to walk around it and the sun was shining and it was, it was just, it was glorious, you know? It was just a wonderful, wonderful thing and so I—you know, I, I, I enjoy the traveling

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but just getting back to Venice. Venice was my—is my heart. I'd love to go back there. Venice has the noises, it has the smells. It has—we were staying in a place in Lido and it wasn't, and I though we were staying in the Piazza San Marco and but in order to get to, in order to get to Piazza San Marco or the Rialto Bridge we had to take the vaporettos, vaporetto, but that was wonderful. It's the boat, the public transportation. But I loved it. If I had been in the San Marco Plaza I wouldn't have done that. But every day to go any place we wanted to go we had to take it, that's Venice you know so that was a living experience for me you know? And then the other thing is that my favorite opera composer Wagner he died in Venice. And that's right, although that's a different [inaudible], that's what I think about all the time. He died in a palazzo that's right on the Grand Canal which is now a casino. And they say that if you make special arrangements, call ahead, they'll let you go up to the room where he died. But I decided I wasn't going to push it because I wasn't sure how Mary finds that—or how keen she would be on going to—with me to pay a holy shrine visit to the room where Wagner died with his anti-Semitic self you know so-- . So I said I'm not going to push this you know, but it was, it was wonderful Maxine. But I do love traveling and I didn't start traveling until late in my life, until my 30s. You know--?

IN: Did you go have a Bellini? Did you go to Harry's Bar?

VC: Before you go I've got the Harry's Bar martini glass in my refrigerator. Listen, Mary got the Bellini, I said I want a martini, you know I want a martini, so Mary said I'll get the Bellini. They brought this martini and I'll show you the glass, you won't believe it though when you see it. This little glass, maybe I shouldn't say that, the third person's not supposed to be here. But anyways, she's our creative, creative director.

[Laughter]

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VC: So Mary ordered the Bellini. I got the martini and it was the best martini. I said oh my God, and Mary said you want to taste this Bellini? I said sure. So I tasted the Bellini, I said finish it and get yourself a martini kid, you're not playing in the big leagues. The martini was 32 dollars a glass. 32, but I was on my vacation and I figured--. I'm going to show you the glass you won't believe it. And so, and they bring you a plate with olives on the side, so you can put as many olives as you want on it. Mary said this is—now the thing about it is like they have a place now in New York called Harry's Bar or something. Not Harry's Bar but what is it, Ciprianis, Ciprianis and he's the guy that created Harry's Bar, it's Ciprianis. So we said we have to go down there, I don't know how they do it, I don't know how they do it but they give you a glass and even after half an hour of drinking and holding the glass it's still icy cold. So Mary said maybe it's with liquid ice and they freeze it first before they bring—I don't know. But Maxine, it is an experience, we loved it. And then we had—and after she got that, I said we're going to get another one and we'll split it you know? Instead--.

[Receives phone call; End of Tape]

[END OF TAPE 2; SIDE A]