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## Carr, Sylvia

Bronx African American History Project  
*Fordham University*

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Mark Naison (MN): Twenty-Sixth interview of the Bronx African-American History Project, and we're talking with a group of people who grew up in a small middle-class community in the northeast Bronx, around Fish Ave. And what I basically would like to do to start was to each of you tell me how your families came to move to that area. And I guess if we start with you Eddie, how did you--

Eddie: Well my family originally lived in Harlem, on about 140<sup>th</sup> St, and then when my mother and father got together, they moved to a place on 219<sup>th</sup> St.

MN: Do you remember what year that was?

Eddie: Must have been 1934 something like that, and then they moved from there to 222<sup>nd</sup> St., and then from there they moved to Fish Ave.

MN: So this was a neighborhood where African-Americans were able to buy homes?

Eddie: The Williamsbridge section was roughly, well it was predominantly white. But there were enclaves of Blacks living on sections of streets on the 217, Paulding Ave, Laconia Ave, 222<sup>nd</sup> St, 223<sup>rd</sup> St. and up there, and also on Fish Ave on our stretch on either side of Boston Rd. And around the corner there were other families. And there were blacks owned their homes. It was half of the people there I think were West Indian, and the other half were American blacks.

MN: Was your family from the Caribbean or from the South?

Eddie: No my mother and father, my mother was from South Carolina, and my father was from Denver, Colorado. Yes, and they moved there and we met all of the, our neighbors.

And we've known them I think it was since, I am sure it was since 1940. I am sure since then, and we got together I think again about ten years ago for the first reunion that we have had from the Williamsbridge section that was involved. And my social group was also on Fish Ave, but also centered around a church. The St Luke's Episcopal Church on 222<sup>nd</sup> St. and Barnes Ave. I think it was. So we grew up around there and the reunion was centered around that group of people.

MN: Now was that a predominantly African-American church when you were growing up?

Eddie: We were colored then.

MN: Colored, ok. It was a predominantly colored church?

Eddie: Yes.

Others: It was all colored

MN: It was all colored? Ok.

Eddie: It was all colored and half of those people were Jamaicans and the other half were Southern Black American.

MN: And that Church is still there?

Eddie: That Church is still there active congregation; we just buried one of the 88-year-old ladies who was living there last summer.

MN: Were there other important institutions in that community that you remembered? Were there community centers?

Eddie: Not really, most of us just would hang out on, in front of our homes or we played in the playgrounds, we played in the fields in Moose field, and around. And we played in the summertime we played games out in the street. No there wasn't anything that I was organized in, my mother would let me join the boy scouts, *or whatever it was*, but because it was in Holy Rosary and that was too far away from where we lived and so she wouldn't let me join that. There was no PAL that I knew of, there was no.

Courtney: No there was, because your brother and I used to go to the PAL, we used to get tickets from the precinct. But not an organized PAL we used to go to the precinct and get tickets, PAL tickets to go to the hockey games down in Madison Square Garden.

Women: Really? Where was the precinct?

Courtney: White Plains Rd. and 220--right by the library, you remember where the library is, right over there.

Eddie: 227<sup>th</sup> or 228<sup>th</sup>.

*Courtney: 228<sup>th</sup> or 229<sup>th</sup> street.*

*Woman #1: Up, up...*

MN: Ok, Courtney when did your family move to the Bronx?

Courtney: Well I was born in 1934, first early part of my life was down in the Jersey Shore. Then, to the lower Bronx, I am talking on one or two years in each place. And then we wound up on 217<sup>th</sup> St just off White Plains Rd. when I was about five, four or five, I was not in school.

*So that would be the '40s? No....*

MN: So this was the late '30s?

Courtney: Yes this'll be the late '30s. So then around *1940, around* 1939, when I started school we moved to Fish Ave. And so I started school 1939 PS 78, so I was on Fish Ave at that time. 78 was the only school I ever went to, the only elementary school I ever went to. There was my house, there was, there was one, three, five, seven-- There were eight houses on our block, seven of which were black, the last house was Italian. And over there where the single private houses were all Italian, mostly Italians.

Woman 1: On the other side of Post Road.

Courtney: No, on the other side of Needham Ave. And then across the street from me, was a project called Hillside, the Hillside Homes where she comes from.

MN: Right.

Courtney: I think, if I am not mistaken that was the first high-density apartment complex in the United States, if I am not mistaken, first or second. And there were many Jews in there, some Irish, one or two Germans, but mostly Jewish. So we all went to the same school 78.

MN: You all went to the same elementary school?

Group: Yes.

Courtney: All went to the same elementary school, and the only other cultural institution I know of in that neighborhood was the Jewish Center of Violet Park, which was a block away from us. Seymour.

Woman 1: Yes on the other side.

Eddie: The temple you know.

Courtney: And I tried to join, see I am older than him by what how many years?

Eddie: Three.

Courtney: I tried to join, his brother and I tried to join something called the Sea Scouts.

Cause in our days there were no Boy Scouts in that area. Sea Scouts were over on White Plains Rd. 225<sup>th</sup> St 223<sup>rd</sup> St somewhere around there, they had all these nice uniforms, they walked around, carried a flag and everything. They said no coloreds could join, so we didn't get to join the Sea Scouts. Now what else do you want?

MN: Well one thing is you know what kind of work did your fathers do? And what was the sort of predominant economic base of the community in terms of you know what kind of--

Courtney: In my house, in my building my father was a welder my mother was a nurse, the landlord was a postal worker, his wife was a nurse. The next building, I don't know the guy was in real estate I think. The following--

Woman 1: Jackson?

Courtney: Yes, I don't know real estate, insurance? The next building was Thomas he was real estate, and then the next building is his mother.

Eddie: My mother was a, worked for the IRS. And my father was in the Army.

Courtney: And above them were ex-show girls, a couple of ex-show girls, black showgirls. Next to that house was Sylvia's family her father owned, was a businessman. Meat market I

think, yes he had a couple of markets in his day. And above them *her mother-*

Woman: Was in nursery school--

Courtney: Her mother was in nursery school. The next were the Murrell's, school teacher and what did Mr. Murrell--

Man 1: Schoolteacher and *he was a* probation officer.

Courtney: Is that what he was?

Woman: Is that what he was, Edward's father?

Courtney: Edward's father.

Woman2: But he had gone to medical school in Germany.

Eddie: Really I did not know that, that is amazing.

Courtney: I didn't know that either, and then it was that house. The next house was the Townsend and they were Italian. His wife was white and he was black and it was an extremely unhappy family, from what we could see. We all dreaded them. Yes, they were like very miserable people.

Woman: She was French.

Courtney: Right Ok. But something happened, something went wrong because they were unhappy people.

Eddie: They would always peer out their window at us.

Courtney: The final house were the Italians and what they did I don't know. Whatever they did they had a very weird odor coming out of that building, when you walked past that house it was like a musty odor.

Woman: They buried bodies.

Courtney: Very strange, which I only smelled at that house, I never smelled at anywhere else.

The closest thing would be on the Hudson tube smell. [laughter]

MN: So that was the economic base?

Woman: Mrs. Hillerman was a teacher and her husband was a lawyer.

Courtney: I forgot her, I forgot those two. That's right.

MN: Now it is interesting that you say that term at that time people called each other colored in the 30's and 40's.

***Man: Yeah, we were colored. Politely we were called coloreds.***

MN: Did that last through the 50's and 60's would you say?

Man: I think so because we, they objected to Negro so they were called colored. And then the phrases or what--

Courtney: Well Martin used to use Negro. Martin used Negro whenever he was speaking until he came along I think it was ***colored***.

Man: Yes, the Negroes in the South, in the South.

MN: Tony, now what you know you had talked to me before. But how did your family come to the neighborhood?

Tony: Because, well I grew up, as I said I lived in Queens in a neighborhood that aside from the Celtics was primarily Irish I think. And I am not really sure, I think the Celtic was

probably a mixture of Irish and Jewish. And anti-Semitism is what drove everybody to the Bronx. How people knew about Hillside I have no idea.

Man: Well it was a big thing in those days.

Tony: What?

Man2: That was made by an insurance company--

*Metropolitan.*

Tony: Yes, like Stuyvesant town.

MN: Right, now Stuyvesant town and Parkchester had white-only clauses. The Hillside, there were no blacks.

Man: There were no blacks.

Tony: No there were two.

Courtney: Ooh.

Eddie: My uncle.

Courtney: That was *latter day, right when* I first got there his uncle wasn't there.

Tony: Well that is true.

Woman: I moved there, must have been, I think 1954. I guess I was twelve when I moved there. And—

Eddie: I can only say that before I left out of there my uncle was in, before '56 he was in there.

Courtney: Well if you go there at night you wouldn't know white people ever live there!

Eddie: Really?

MN: Really?

Courtney: Oh man, whoa.

***Woman #1: Well, I also gather that you wouldn't know that your folks even lived there (over Courtney)...***

Eddie: That is strange to hear. Well if you *lived, if you saw* my graduation picture, from PS 78, there were six black children in the class. Out of a class of I think more than 200.

MN: And what year was that?

Eddie: This *was* 1948, when I graduate PS 78.

Courtney: What are you talking about?

Eddie: '49.

Courtney: Alight, that's better.

Eddie: '49.

Courtney: I got out in '48 so I know you didn't get out in '48.

MN: So Tony now you had mentioned that--

Eddie: Well I think, we graduated together.

[Laughter]

Eddie: You may be wrong because--

Man: I know one thing, you're not in my picture.

***Woman #1: Now, now boys...(over the men)***

Eddie: No, I didn't--

Courtney: You're brother's in my picture, but not you.

Eddie: No, no, no you're right, it's probably a year later. But yes, it's probably a year later.

MN: Now Tony you had mentioned before that some members of your family had been Communist?

Tony: Yes.

MN: Yes, and was that something you were aware of when you were growing up? Or was it something more hush-hush?

Tony: It was sort of in-between. I mean nobody ever said “we're Communists.” It was more the Daily Worker got passed up and down the building wrapped in another newspaper.

Woman: Really?

Tony: Yes, it wasn't--

Man: What year was this Tony?

Tony: '50s sometime after--

MN: Did the FBI ever come to your house?

Tony: Yes.

MN: And did they follow the kids to school at all?

Tony: Not that I know of.

MN: But they came, you were aware of the FBI coming to the door.

Tony: Yes.

MN: And were you told--

Tony: Except I have it mixed up, because I know they came when I was young. But they also came because of one of my boyfriends, Joe...Johnson.

MN: So--we'll get to that. But were you told by your parents, don't talk to the FBI? Was there, or it wasn't that explicit?

Tony: I am assuming I had been. But it was more stuff like, I found out that kids were told that they shouldn't play with me. But I didn't find this out till high school, until I was older. Because it really didn't seem to stop anybody, that was the thing.

MN: Now, was part of your family's political tradition having an awareness of what in that time was called Negro history, or did you have Paul Robeson records in the house? Or anything that would have reflected the party's position on racial integration?

Tony: I am sure we did, but it was nothing -- we weren't lectured.

MN: You weren't lectured--

Tony: We weren't lectured on you know on racial equality and labor rights and everything, we were just kids growing up. And that was the thing I was trying to figure out, because I was trying to remember when I first met Sylvia. Which I guess was in the fifth grade, and I don't remember, because it was just always there, kind of. I do, I remember that when I lived in Queens, there was a girl in my class who was part American Indian. And she wouldn't play with me, and I found out it was because I was white. But I didn't find that out--

Man: Well who did she play with?

Tony: What?

Man: Who did she play with?

Tony: She didn't play with anybody.

Man: Well I'd guess not.

MN: Now Sylvia how did your family come to Fish Ave?

Tony: Wait and my father was, let's see when was that? I am trying to remember what he-- my mother worked in a local music school as a secretary. And my father worked at the *Hasselblog* camera company, something with a shirt and tie there.

Man: Good camera.

Tony: It was my dowry for a long time, then he sold it to someone.

[Laughter]

Sylvia Carr (SC): I don't know exactly why my parents bought in the Bronx. I sort of have a vague recollection that it might have been *either* Mr. Thomas or the Delaney's somehow got-

Courtney: That particular block had a very big reputation among inner-city blacks as sort of an upscale place where blacks would go and live to escape the inner city.

Woman: That part of Fish Ave?

SC: Yes.

MN: Oh, so this was known as sort of elite--

Group: Yes.

SC: In fact Benny, what's his name?

Man: Primp.

SC: Benny Primp has, now Benny is, what I don't know. How old is he seventy?

Man2: He is seventy, yes.

SC: He is a doctor and he has often said to me, made snide comments--

Man: Yes, yes he makes snide comments all the time.

SC: Makes a zillion dollars now and obviously didn't—

Man: He had a Phoenix house and all that.

SC: Right I mean he just—

MN: You know so he makes snide comments, you're from Fish Ave. It's like coming from Park Ave., a silver spoon is the image—*If you grew up on Fifth Avenue...*

Man: Yes, yes.

Man2: When I went to parties where you mentioned you were from Fish Ave you'd get a hush over the room.

MN: Really? Wow. Now where had your family lived before they moved to the Bronx?

SC: They lived at 1902 Seventh Ave., apartment 4D. 115<sup>th</sup> St and Seventh Ave. And the building is still there.

MN: And where, was your family southern originally?

SC: Yes my mother was from Mississippi, Aberdeen and my father was from Charlestown, South Carolina. And all of my mother's brothers and, six brothers and one sister all moved to New York. My father was the only one in his family that moved to New York. And he came to New York to get a Masters Degree from NYU, and he stayed. And was introduced to my mother through a fraternity brother.

MN: Now was there a Jack and Jill organization on Fish Ave?

SC: Yes.

Man: Yes, well our representative was the Thomas'.

SC: And the Murrell's.

Man: And the Murrells, they were in the club and that is how we got invited to their parties. I was never a member and I don't think either of--

SC: I wasn't either I hated all that stuff.

MN: So there was a Jack and Jill scene but none of you were--

Man: We were a part of it but we weren't in it.

Man2: We looked through the door, but we weren't in the room. [laughs]

Man: And so we went to their parties but our families didn't know each other, I didn't meet their parents, we met the children.

MN: Right, now did you grow up with politics in your home political discussions, and what sorts of discussions, what sort of organizations were your parents involved in?

Man: Well my mother was probably involved with her girlfriends, in the girlfriends' social clubs that she was involved with. I don't know which, I don't know which other clubs she was in but—*she was in women's clubs...*

MN: She was in women's clubs, and charitable activities.

Man: Right. And that is about all I can remember.

MN: Right, but neither of your parents were in the local chapter of the NAACP? Or weren't involved in local political clubs?

Man: No, not that I know of.

MN: Right, what about you Courtney?

Courtney: Same thing. No, if you are going to take to anything political in my family it was I'd say my father was in a Democratic Club and got me a job at a PO, a business job in a PO. But that is it, he didn't even talk about the Democratic Club, I *just* know he went there. My

mother told me he went there, but we had no political conversations at all in my house.

MN: What about you Sylvia?

SC: We did, my father was very interested in politics. And even when I was at Hunter, he made me take Russian because he said you are going to see, what is going to happen is that the United States and Russia are going to work together and you should learn Russian. Well I didn't listen as usual, but he -- my parents, particularly my father were big supporters of Crisis Magazine and the NAACP.

MN: Was there a local NAACP chapter in Williamsbridge that you were aware of?

Man: That we were aware of no.

SC: No not that I know of.

MN: Now what about you are telling me, what organizations were your parents involved in?

Woman: Well I know that they actually met at the YCL.

Man: Young Communists?

Woman: My mother was an orator.

Woman: My father was impressed by that, but I think I don't know if there was a branch of the Party. I mean people met at people's houses. Before my, some of my mother and one of my uncles were union organizers. But I was so unaware of you know, I know they talked politics all of their friends would have all the way through my life this whole group of them would have these endless ongoing, wonderful, screaming, yelling, political arguments about everything under the sun. But you know and they did go on May Day marches and stuff like that, but organized, actually once I asked my mother if she had a Party card and she said she

never saw a card in her life so--

MN: Now, this you know basically racially mixed enclave in the Bronx which you grew up in, when you were growing up were you told that there were certain places where if you were colored it was you know dangerous to go? Or was that not an issue for you?

Group: No.

Eddie: No, no that was never an issue.

MN: Never an issue?

Eddie: Never an issue, we were never told not to go anywhere or not talk to any, we would talk to anybody who would talk to us. And we had most, white friends, we had white friends.

Courtney: Any problems we had racially, was not racial, it was black gangs from other neighborhoods.

Eddie: That is what I was going to say, with you and Skippy they had more trouble with black people than they had with, oh yes, *white people*. That they had, every time that, because Courtney and Skippy, my brother, would go somewhere they would run in to people. But this is when we were teenagers I assume.

MN: So this is in the fifties? Or late--

Eddie: Yes.

MN: Now, where were these gangs?

Eddie: Well I had trouble, well ok, the trouble was when they built these tenements in the Burke Ave Houses or around where Pearsall Ave where the--

Courtney: No they were from 225th St.

Eddie: Oh, 225th, oh those guys.

MN: Where those guys from Public Housing or—

Eddie: No.

Courtney: No these were guys from private homes. But they were more in to the thug thing than we were.

Eddie: That is true.

Courtney: See when I was growing up myself and his brother, because I am older than these two, we got involved in Jazz. So we spent all nearly all of our spare time downtown here in Manhattan, Birdland, Bop City, Basis St and all these joints. So we didn't have time for gang activity. What was happening with us was Dizzie and people like that, Dizzie Gillespie, not gangs. And in high school we were, now the guys I am talking about only dealt with black folks, we dealt with anybody.

Eddie: At Evander Childs High School.

Courtney: Evander. And they didn't like the fact that we talked to white people. So that is what our problem was—it didn't come from the whites...

MN: This is interesting so this is, was, a whole group of tough black kids who didn't like the idea of black kids having white friends. Did you do better in school than they did? Was that an issue?

Courtney: That was an issue, it was a racial colored issue.

MN: It was a racial color issue.

Eddie: It was a color issue strictly.

Courtney: And I tend to think that their parents were not as high to scale as our parents were, economically.

Eddie: They were dark skinned people who were angry at these lighter skinned people.

MN: So there was a color difference also. *And that's something that was playing out here...*

Eddie: I didn't have that problem. I had a problem when I went to, a color problem that I remember. We had spin the bottles in Hillside Homes and Letty Joseph wouldn't kiss me, but she would kiss Harris Spector like I mean you know. And then when I went to my prom graduating from 8b that I went to the prom and went to try to dance *with* Jean Masi and she wouldn't dance with me.

Courtney: His brother and I didn't go to our prom.

Eddie: Yes and then I danced with Joan Cromono once and then she said I can't dance with you anymore.

Courtney: Joan Cromono she's in my class?

Eddie: I told you—[laughter]

MN: This is what at high school?

Eddie: This is elementary.

MN: Elementary school? Oh they went to eighth grade. Ok.

Eddie: And so it was that was a problem so it was then that we were introduced to, my group was introduced, she was a couple years younger than I. But my group like Nanny Murrell and Bazzle Thomas that when we had to go to the Jack and Jill parties. And we were introduced to these people in Manhattan.

MN: Right, so there was, when you reached adolescence there was a sense that there was a racial divide happening and that interracial dating--

Man: The doors shut down.

Courtney: But not imposed by the whites.

Man: No Letty Joseph and Jean Massey who was a pretty girl, she wouldn't dance with me and I felt heartbroken, I remember the name.

[Laughter]

Man: And then we went to see all these ugly girls downtown, these high-yellow girls in the Ivy Delph apartments.

Courtney: You know what high-yellow is?

MN: Yes

Man: That.

[Laughter]

Man: As he points at Sylvia!

Eddie: So they were not pretty, they had nothing on any Dominican girl that has ever lived, they were like Barbadian women they were the ugliest chicks that I have ever seen. And there were a couple of cute ones that were so stuck up, they were so pretty that everybody fawned over them and they were doctors daughters, etc. etc. And they thought they were the cat's meow, [laughter] and so there was a whole scene getting to get together with fifteen and fourteen fifteen sixteen--

MN: So in other words race consciousness set in the high school age.

Man: Oh, absolutely I think.

Courtney: One girl told me that she couldn't go out with me anymore, she went out with me once but she--

Eddie: Yes, their fathers said no good. And remember I went, that was one of the reasons, well that is not true, I went to DeWitt Clinton because my brother went to Evander so, he had more truck with the girls at that time.

Woman: The other side of that is, that Edward told me he could never marry me because his parents would die if he married a white girl, and of course he did.

Man: Yes, of course he did. Of course we did.

[Laughter]

Man: Of course we did, they would rather that he marry a black like his daughter, like his sister?

Woman: I guess so, I remember standing in the playground--

MN: Now this is Edward is someone who also--

Man: Edward Murrell.

MN: Who was also from Fish Ave?

Man: He is a brother of a woman who was married to this guy who was trying to blow up the Statue of Liberty about twenty years ago. You remember that? Are you from New York?

MN: Oh yes, I am from Brooklyn.

Man: The thing with Canada, the Statue of Liberty--

MN: Yes, all of that, yes.

Woman: That was in 60's.

Man: Yes, when I came back from the Army.

Courtney: Ok, I didn't say what day it was.

Woman: I thought you said twenty years ago.

Courtney: Forty years ago.

Eddie: When I came back from the Army she wanted me to meet him. And she wanted, she called me up to meet him.

Courtney: Timmy Walter?

Woman: Yes.

Man: Yes.

Courtney: He is a raving idiot Walter.

Eddie: Right and I said what is going on with this guy? And he says do you have any dynamite?

Courtney: He's a raving idiot.

Eddie: Do you have any dynamite? And I said first of all don't you know you're being infiltrated, don't you know that people are going to be after you? Because when I was, I was at Montefiore you know I, we all of a sudden we were meeting white guy Communists. You know longhaired, striped shirts, dungarees, and combat boots. And they were always trying to talk *to* black guys, I said you are a Communist right? You know, and so--

MN: This was when you were at the hospital, as a physician.

Eddie: Yes, right, and--

Courtney: Who were these guys? Were they also physicians or just guys that--

Man: Hanging around.

Courtney: Just guys off the street.

MN: They are probably my friends.

Man: But I was, I even talked to people who were in the Black Panthers, I'd go to talk to the sister of the guy who got shot with the thing in his hair, the gun in his hair up there in the prison. I talked to these people down in the village, you know.

MN: These are all my friends.

Man: And he was a very smart.

MN: I am not kidding. [laughs]

Man: These were smart gals, but I met guys later. Guys who are my friends now who were in the FBI at the time.

Woman: Oh really?

MN: Well the FBI moved into my building when I was living on 99<sup>th</sup> St., we were under surveillance for three days.

Man: But they were my good friends, and they were tracking what is that guy's name that married the African girl.

Man2: Stokey Carmichael.

Man: They were assigned to Stokey Carmichael.

Woman: Oh really?

Man3: What happened was, about this Communist thing, which goes back to the late '40s.

What had happened was, the Scottsborough Boys who were still a big thing, they could still get headlines. And that case was only about ten years old at the time. And nobody else was paying attention to the Scottsborough Boys. And so the Communists jumped on this. At the same time Marian Anderson couldn't get arrested you know as far as getting a place to sing, they wouldn't let us sing anywhere. And they were giving Paul Robeson a hard time also, these are like heavy-duty people Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson. And nobody seemed to *give a sh\*\** except the Communists, they jumped on this. So now you have these three entities and you got these white people who were backing them. And black people saying well maybe this is a way to influence the power structure a little bit here. So this thing was *pretty--* moving around in those days. But my feeling is that this is what was driving it, not the one the Communist doctrine where all one shade and all that stuff.

MN: Right, yes. It was a lever to try to change American—

Group: Yes.

Woman: So we could change not great redistribution of wealth, because I do have vague recollection of you know my parents talking about the Scottsborough boys and the whole thing about not going to Peekskill to hear Paul Robeson sing because they thought that there would be--

Man: Riots.

Woman: *Riots*. They didn't go you know-- I knew about that kind of thing. But it was, in a sense I sort of had, the things I remember, well this one I don't remember my mother told me. That in the seventh or eighth grade I had a party where I invited everybody. And one of the

parents called my mother up and said you know we may go to school with them but we don't have parties with them. And my mother said well your daughter doesn't, I think it was Susan Cosra, I think.

Woman 2: No Carol Lewis.

Woman: Well my mother said well she doesn't have to come to the party, and she came. But when Edward, now this is in high school, when Edward used to walk me home, and this is in two blocks from Fish Ave. to my house is a two-block walk. The Italian hoods in the neighborhood *used to--* when I was alone, they would call me hippie.

MN: Hippie?

Woman: That was the biggest insult they could think of calling me.

MN: And this was what year was this would you say?

Woman: 1958.

MN: But they wouldn't, but you didn't feel physically threatened when you and Edward walked home together, by these guys?

Woman: No.

Eddie: No, nobody ever attacked you for being black.

Woman: One, it did happen once.

Eddie: To who?

Woman: When I was in college, when I was dating somebody. And he got followed to the Dyre Ave subway stop. But he was, this was Joe, he was a fencer. And he had his sword.

[Laughter]

Man: You mean a saber?

Woman: No he had an *epi*--and they probably were so terrified at this that they didn't do anything.

Man: As well they should be.

Woman: *And so he broke it so* that he had a real weapon, and you know that was the end of it.

Man: That would work.

Woman: And that was basically the only--

Courtney: I've never heard anything like that.

Woman: Once in high school my homeroom teacher said to me, I was dating a classmate in high school who was black. She said, she kept me after class and she said "Do your parents know about this? And I said, "Yes he's been in the house, they've met him."

Man: Who was your homeroom teacher?

Woman: Mrs. Espinower.

Courtney: No, I don't know her. I had one friend, a boy friend a guy I was like this with. Eleven or twelve years old, something around there. Benny Santoro whom lived on the other side of the Post Rd. We were like. So one afternoon I went over to Benny's house to get, to go invite him to go out and play or whatever. Benny said I can't go out and play with you anymore. My father says I can't play with you anymore.

Eddie: The only time I had a problem was in a Hillside Home, one guy said to me "go back to where you come from" and "I can put dirt on my face and look just like you." And that was the only time I ever heard of a racial remark.

Courtney: I never heard one in the Bronx.

Eddie: But you know never, this was an idiot. And I said, you know I'll hurt you.

[Laughter]

Man: Did you hit him?

Eddie: Probably not, because we never had run-ins, we never had any racial run-ins, with you know white people for being black.

Woman: I had one incident.

Eddie: You did?

Man: How would anybody know you were black?

Woman: I don't know, but I think I was in the seventh maybe the eighth grade, I doubt it was even the eighth grade. And there was a birthday party at Kenneth G'Annetto's house, his parents had a house is it Needham, what's the other street?

Man: Needham and Hicks.

Woman: Hicks, up on Hicks St. And I have, this is the only recollection *I have* obviously. The party was in the basement, and whatever kids do at parties. And for whatever reason I remember Kenneth saying "you're a nigger!" Now I don't, I didn't leave the party it didn't stop--I mean whatever provoked that--

Man: Kenneth said this to you?

Woman: Yes.

Man: The guy who was having the party?

Woman: Yes. [laughs]

Man: Good host.

Woman: And that was, whatever happened that was the end of it. I mean--and I haven't, well I think Kenneth went to Evander I don't even know if we went to high school together. But I certainly--

Woman2: He was on the list, he did go to Evander.

Woman: He did go to high--well I don't remember him at all in high school. But we had a reunion, our thirty-eighth high school reunion a few years ago. And one of the people I was really curious about seeing was Kenneth G'Annetto, he was the first person who gave me a big hug.

[Laughter]

Man: You're kidding.

Woman: I mean it was the strangest, I mean his parents said it you know his mother must have said it.

Man: So he heard it.

Woman: So he heard it and he repeated it.

Woman2: My parents were friendly with Johnny Hendricks.

Group: Yes, right.

Man: My uncle was friendly; we used to give him money to get his teeth fixed.

Woman2: Really?

Man: Or to do something, to give him some money for food also. He was living with his wife you know.

Man: Who is this?

Group: Johnny Hendricks.

Woman: He used to come over to my parent's house I don't even remember this. But that was the thing when I must have really been young then, because that was the thing where "Oh, they must be communists because this black person that comes to their house."

Man: Yes, that was big in those days.

MN: Yes, no absolutely. In fact when they were doing the Truman Loyalty Investigations and after '47, one of the things that could bring you under suspicion is if you were white is if you had black people over your house socially. That would put you under suspicion.

Man: Number one sign.

MN: So, this whole experience do you think that this neighborhood experience prepared you for the outside world as you entered it?

Courtney: I would say in my case yes, because it taught me to live with races other than my own, which is what I had to do all of my professional life. So it was not a problem for me to deal with non-black people.

MN: It was an advantage growing up this way?

Courtney: I think it was.

Eddie: Well we had social intercourse with both white and black so it made it easier for us to go out in the world, I think. And it wasn't a strange world. Like if I lived in Harlem and I went to Europe from there it would be totally, it would be culture shock. So it wasn't a big

culture shock for me when I was nineteen years old and landed in *Harlem to go to school*--

MN: Now Sylvia you said something, you know, when we were corresponding, about growing up innocent in those times. And how, what did that you know, what did you mean by that in that context in relation to this discussion?

SC: I think, I mean now we are talking about race. But it wasn't anything I ever remember talking about.

Eddie: The only thing that I can remember--

MN: It wasn't something anybody ever talked about?

Group: No, no.

Eddie: The only thing that I remember was that when I went down to Harlem to get my hair cut, when I was going to CCNY. Sixteen or whatever I was, Emmitt Till was killed and they found him, you know they dug up his body or whatever in the swamp. That picture was, when I was in the barbershop there was a picture of his body in Jet Magazine.

MN: And that was, you remember that moment.

Eddie: I remember that moment.

Woman: I remember that too.

MN: That is interesting too because several of my colleagues have mentioned that to me.

Courtney: What year was that?

MN: 1955. He was killed in the summer of '55, and you remember that moment?

Eddie: Vividly, and a year later I was going to Europe, I was like, "Get the hell out of here!"

MN: So you went to Europe to medical school, were you was that partly something to get out

of the United States?

Eddie: No, no, that was a whole different circumstance. I went, I wanted to go to Howard University because well I thought that that would be a good medical school. And I knew a, I had a girlfriend who's mother was a professor down there. So I went to visit Cheryl Wormly's *mother*, Edward Bush--I forgot the name was a very famous down there, that was his daughter. Anyway, I asked this professor whether I should go to medical school there, I was how old? I was eighteen, and she said "You will never get in here at this age, you will never get in regardless of your grades if you are a straight A student." I don't know if they had the GPA's or whatever it is. Grade Point Average, GPA. So you will never get in so they will never take you. "They may let you come in to the dental school, but they will never let you go in to the Medical School."

Man: Why not?

Eddie: Because I was too young, because they had guys, you know who was trying to get in, well Cunningham was trying to get in to those things.

Woman: Yes much older.

Eddie: Much older, I mean these guys are five and six years older than I was. And they were, he was a veteran so--

Courtney: So you were going to be penalized for being *too young*--

Eddie: Absolutely I was, so when I came home I was mortified. So I spoke to another girlfriend's father who was John Mosley who was a black professor of Radiology at Mount

Sinai who had graduated from Harvard University and then they wouldn't let him in to Harvard Medical School so he went to Chicago Medical School, and then came to Sinai. And then he said "Ed I know you've been taking German and French in College, or in high school why don't you go to Europe? Because I remember you always talking to Jane about The Student Prince."

Women: [laughs] Oh, my god.

Eddie: So I went home and I said to my mother. "Mother, Dr. Mosley was thinking that I should go to Europe to Medical school." She said why not? And I remember that she was combing her hair, she was combing her hair at her dressing table and she looked up, and she looked at me and said why not? Now, my mother in 1948 had gone to Europe, and part of her tour in Europe where she modeled for Ebony.

Woman: Really?

Eddie: I have the pictures. She modeled--

Man: Show us these pictures.

Eddie: Yes, Skippy has the colored things and I have the reprints.

Man: I got to see these.

Eddie: And then from there she went to Switzerland. And I have a picture of her and Uncle

Eddie, Uncle Eddie in the Lake *of Zurich*--

Courtney: I never saw these pictures.

Eddie: Yes, Skip has them you should see them.

Courtney: I never saw these pictures.

Eddie: And so she had--

(END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE; BEGINNING OF TAPE ONE SIDE TWO)

Woman: Mother and father--

Eddie: Well so that -- well it's in my book.

[Laughter]

Eddie: I'd rather talk about it in my book, it is very interesting.

Woman: What are you calling the book?

Eddie: Fade to White.

Courtney: We've got to see what kind of paper he's working on.

MN: No I'm this project is basically, this is going to be in an archive. The interviews will be transcribed and put on tape, and put in the Bronx Historical Society and Fordham University Library for future historians.

Tony: See, after he had an article in *The Times*--

MN: It was an article about my research, that is Tony found out about it.

Tony: And I wrote to him and said you really have to, you know you might be interested in this--

MN: See trust me I am not writing another book any time soon.

Courtney: That's yours?

MN: Yes.

Courtney: Ok.

MN: And it is a memoir that I published last year so.

Eddie: The reason I don't want to talk about it is because that is one of the poignant parts

of my book. *But my mother was very helpful in fact.* She wasn't, she wasn't neutral she said go so that is why I applied. And then I got into, it was a whole other adventure when you know you find out, why I went and where I went and *how I went and how I even* got to Switzerland was just an incredible adventure for the year.

Courtney: If you look at television channel shows, day time channel shows, these days you will see a lot of young black people on there who have had some negative experiences in life because of their skin color. And the only real negative one that I had it didn't slap my in my face. When I wanted to be a railroad engineer my father told me you can't cause you can't get in to the brotherhood, they won't let you in the brotherhood.

MN: Yes, the brotherhood right.

Courtney: When I see kids on TV because they don't like each other, this one's a different shade that one's a -- and they're like this at each other's throats, we had none of that.

Eddie: We had none of that that is for sure.

Courtney: Ok, in our group the black group there was every color from her color to--

Eddie: Shirley Hillerman.

Courtney: Shirley Hillerman shoe polish black.

Woman: She was darker than anything.

Courtney: And nobody ever *even said anything negative about that--*

Eddie: And she had a, evidently she had a hang-up because what she wrote, she wrote me about that.

*Courtney: And now it's a big deal.*

MN: What's interesting, here you are you have a black community where a whole spectrum of colors and backgrounds--

Eddie: Well, that wasn't the whole spectrum, most of those people, well we were the darkest ones.

Courtney: What about the Thomas family?

Eddie: They were all--they were all different shades, they had different shades.

Courtney: Different shades, there was seven kids every one of them was a different color.

Eddie: But I am saying for the most part the kids were fair.

Woman: Nobody was black except for--

Eddie: They weren't dark black they weren't dark black. *Or very Negro.*

Woman: Oh I know one thing, when Edward went to, he went to RPI, and he pledged a Pi, you know which was a Jewish Fraternity. And they said to him how about it may not have been a Pi it may have been another one. They said we'll take you in if you tell everybody you're Hispanic. Because he was sort of in-between their color was, so he could pass but he *was* eventually in a Pi as a darker Jew.

MN: So Fish Ave was a, let's say, a lighter skinned group of people.

Eddie: I think so, basically they were not Negroid as such, they wouldn't they--

Courtney: I never could -- but that's about right.

Eddie: Absolutely, when you come to my house when you come to my house and you see all

those people, they're high yellow people. And my daughter's who are white, yes but they look at me and say dad those aren't black people.

MN: That's interesting because I--

Eddie: It's what *you* grew up with, you know Hugh Price and all that--

MN: Yes, I went down I remember, I went down three years ago with my son and my son-in-law, my son-in-law is black to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund Golf Tournament in North Carolina. And we are playing in this tournament and someone said to my son Erick you know you and your dad are the only white people here. And Erick looked around and said, what? Because there were people like from the *Harry* Medical School who had you know blonde hair blue eyes.

Eddie: They are all blonde, they are all light-skinned.

MN: Yes, it was--

Courtney: Ruthie Collins is a blond.

Eddie: All those people are fair as hell, all that group you go down to Howard they are all very fair, in the Medical School.

Courtney: What is your point Mark? What is your point?

MN: No, that there was you know that if you were not in this community you wouldn't have been aware of how the particularities of how people define themselves.

Eddie: I found this out--

Courtney: How do you explain Shirley Hillerman and--

Eddie: She had a chip on her chip on her shoulder as big as that, and she still has.

Courtney: She was ugly too.

Eddie: She was an ugly little black girl.

Courtney: She was ugly.

Eddie: She was an ugly little black girl who was very ugly, she was very ugly. But she grew up--

Woman: And very smart.

Eddie: And smart as a whip.

Woman: I mean she went to Science.

Eddie: Yes and she--

Courtney: I did never say she was--

Eddie: She was a schoolteacher; I think became a principal or something up in Boston. You know, but she wrote me a letter saying that I do not like black people. How the hell could she even think that, you know? I have the letter when I wrote to her.

Courtney: You've got to be kidding me. How long ago did she write you this letter?

Eddie: I think, about eight years ago.

Courtney: And you kept it?

Eddie: I have it.

Woman2: Here are Tony's parents, here is Tony with Eddie's mother, there's pictures of your mother here. This is Shirley Hillerman. [laughs]

Eddie: And she laughs. [laughs] How sad is that?

Courtney: I haven't thought all those people with light skin, I am pretty dark though.

Eddie: Me too. I am as dark as you can get.

MN: Now were any of you at any points in your lives involved in Civil Rights organizations or went to demonstrations?

Courtney: There were none then?

MN: In the fifties there weren't any?

Courtney: Not that can I remember, I don't remember any Civil Rights--

Woman: I don't think the NAACP--

Courtney: They were around.

Group: Yes, they were around.

MN: But there weren't any demonstrations going on in the Bronx or in your neighborhood?

Woman: There wasn't anything going on anywhere until 1963.

MN: So you went to the march on Washington?

Eddie: I was--

Courtney: Martin started this whole thing.

Woman: Yes.

Eddie: I definitely went there.

Woman: Right, right.

Eddie: My girlfriends went there, my girlfriend is standing Jane Mosley.

Woman: Oh really?

Eddie: She is standing behind him in the picture, if you get Ebony Magazine and you *see* the picture of Martin Luther King--

Woman: How did she get there?

Eddie: She was behind him, she knew some guy, Ron something or other who was a counselor. And her father, she and her father are right behind with Tommy Williams, I don't know if you know Tommy Williams.

Woman: No.

Eddie: Anyway they are right behind him.

Courtney: What's next.

Woman2: No I was going to say that is one of the one things, I went all alone. They weren't going.

Woman: I have no recollections--

Courtney: To what, to what though?

Woman: No I went--

MN: The March on Washington of '63.

Woman2: That was one of the more times when I felt I had to do it.

MN: Now were you in college then?

Eddie: Yes.

Woman2: Yes.

Eddie: I was a doctor then, I was an intern.

MN: But like there weren't any like Civil Rights groups at Evander or Clinton or in the college?

Woman: Well I belonged to some L'ouverture Society at Clinton.

Woman2: Really?

Courtney: We had the Lillerby -- Did we have the Liller at Evander or was that at Hunter College?

MN: Where was the Toussaint-L'ouverture Society?

Woman: At Hunter.

MN: At Hunter, so there was--

Woman: Yes, there were about ten of us.

Eddie: Now if you had one of the gals I went to college with, Dianne Lorio. She would be more aware of the political aspects that were going on in the college, at CCNY. Because CCNY with the young bedukies, or whatever they were called there. Yippies, yips, Y--

MN: Yipso.

Eddie: Yipso, yes.

MN: Right, ok.

Woman!: That was all Yipso was around in the late 50's early 60's.

Eddie: Yes.

Woman: Yes.

Courtney: CCNY was probably the most political school around, CCNY.

Eddie: CCNY, so she would be aware, more aware of who, of the Black groups there. But as I said the predominant group of blacks in CCNY at that time were West Indians.

Woman: Really?

Woman: West Indians?

Eddie: I'd say seventy percent, Jamaicans.

Woman: No kidding.

Eddie: Jamaicans and Barbadians. I know them, I know them now. I know where they are, they are at Columbia University.

Courtney: You weren't going to City were you?

Eddie: Yes, I went to City College.

Courtney: Oh, I didn't know that.

Eddie: I went to City College, and *about* seventy percent of them came from Brooklyn. And I was in the, ROTC with Colin Powell.

MN: Really?

Eddie: With Colin Powell.

Courtney: Really?

Eddie: Yes.

[Laughter]

Eddie: You don't remember me in my uniform?

Woman: I do.

Courtney: Yes.

MN: Do you have a picture of you and Colin Powell?

Eddie: No.

MN: We're actually going to try to interview him eventually.

Eddie: But I was--

Courtney: Colin Powell?

MN: Yes.

Eddie: But I was there with Colin Powell in ROTC and he is my age, and we were in the same thing.

MN: Right. Now Courtney--

Eddie: And we, I was a captain in the Army when he was a captain in the Army.

MN: Now you had mentioned this, the jazz scene. How did you become exposed to jazz?

Eddie: That is a whole hour.

Courtney: Very simple Life Magazine. Life Magazine, at that time I always listened to what we used to call Race music, Rhythm and Blues, stuff like that.

MN: Ok, so who were some of the Rhythm and Blues artists?

Courtney: I can't think of any of them right now. Let's see Wynonie Blues Harris was one guy.

MN: Yes, Wynonie Harris.

Courtney: Bullmoose Jackson, Erskine Hawkins but he was like Race music.

MN: What, was there a particular radio station that played that or you got it from record stores?

Courtney: Those we got from records, those we got, there was not a radio station that I was aware of that was playing that kind of music.

MN: Now was there--

Courtney: Later on there became one--

MN: Was there a record store in Williamsbridge that sold what you called the Race records or Rhythm and Blues or you had to go to Manhattan?

Courtney: No because I never bought any of them, I never went to those record stores. I never started buying records until I started buying jazz. I heard the music, we hear the music on everybody's victrola, record player, whatever.

Woman: But nobody bought the records.

Courtney: Well somebody bought them our parents were--

Woman2: All those jazz records--

Courtney: Now, I open up my magazine one day I am listening to all this stuff, Race music like I say. And there is a picture of Billy Eckstein. Now whatever else we've been saying here there was a definite racial separation we all knew about that. Here is a picture of Billy Eckstein with three white girls hanging around him. What is this? You never saw this in print, never saw this. And then the next page is Dizzie Gillespie, and the article is all about this new music. So I am saying what the hell is this? What is this all about? So his brother and myself and two other guys we always used to hang out together, pray pray pray to my father "Can we go down and see what this music is all about?" And he was a final arbiter for me obviously; his mother said if my father says it's ok for me it was ok for his brother to go, like that. Well we finally got his permission to go down there. And they told us, some of the older guys that you'd better get draft cards. Because we're like fourteen years old fifteen years old.

MN: Really this is like late '40s?

Courtney: Yes, that's right late '48, '49 and '50. They put shoe polish up there?

Woman: They put shoe polish. [laughs]

Courtney: Skippy doesn't remember but I remember putting shoes--We had a little growth here.

Eddie: Skippy didn't have any hair—*still doesn't have any hair...*

Courtney: Good enough for Groucho, good enough for me right.

Courtney: So we went down to Bop City which as on 49<sup>th</sup> St and Broadway upstairs. The old, I think it was the old Tropicana Club or something like that. And there is Billy Eckstein, Buddy Johnson, all these people making all this music. Jesus this is a whole new world. And they had a section for people who didn't drink so they must have been hip to the fact that younger people, people younger than eighteen *were--*

Woman: Fourteen year olds. [laughs]

Courtney: Were coming in there cause they--

Eddie: With stuff on their lip!

Woman: Shoe polish.

[Laughter]

Courtney: Think about it, the guys must have known that it was you know shoe polish. But they had a place where non-alcoholic section where you could sit. And to this day I remember their malt, they were the best malts I ever had.

MN: Now was this a big, was this the beginning of bebop and like the end of the big bands?

Or was it smaller--

Courtney: Yes, Well people really had it start about five or six years before that up in Harlem in Minton's. But this was when it became available to the world, it rolled out to the world. Because in these joints we met people, we met people from South Africa. I mean this

is a big deal in the early 50s.

MN: Yes.

Courtney: Chicago, Philadelphia, wherever, San Francisco, wherever you could think of people were down there listening to this outrageous music. So that is how I got involved with that music. And at that time I heard ninety-eight percent of all, of all the giants. There was a couple of guys I didn't hear but--

MN: Wow.

Courtney: And so we watched them develop this music. They would come in on Monday night and have jam sessions. When they weren't getting paid for it, they'd come in and play anyway for the house, for the edification of the audience. I am telling you this was some hot times good music. Some people were smoking pot but it wasn't a big thing, it wasn't like it is now. Although Charlie Parker was hooked, Fats Navarro was hooked.

Eddie: They called it chemicals.

Courtney: Lady Day was hooked.

MN: You saw Billie Holiday down there?

Courtney: Never saw her because she didn't have a cabaret card.

Woman: Really?

Courtney: She got busted on a drug charge. And at that time you had to have a cabaret card issued by the PD if you want to play where there is liquor.

MN: So she could only, she would only perform at a concert hall?

Courtney: Only at a concert, I never saw her at a concert hall. I never saw her live.

MN: Now, another musical question, were any of you very into Rock and Roll when it first--

Eddie: My brother played a saxophone.

MN: He--his saxophone?

Eddie: A tenor sax but he always played the same tune.

Courtney: Yes he was into jazz when he was playing that saxophone.

MN: Now the two of you may be a little older, was there much Doo-Wop singing in the corner and that sort of thing?

Courtney: That is her group.

Woman: Yes.

MN: So yes. So that was very big the Doo-Wop and--

Woman2: Well that was you know Dionne, and the Wanderers.

Woman: I'd buy all the old tapes from Channel 13.

MN: Did either of you ever try to sing in like, and form your own little girl group or something? Become the Shirelles--

Courtney: We did this thing, and we used to sing—

Woman2: No, I played the guitar.

Courtney: See our house, Fish Ave faced the school. And in the middle of that school wall was an exit, three doors. And all of the guy kids in the neighborhood, Artie Coleman was the leader, was an older guy. And we would get over there on that stoop and sing, well we mostly sang spirituals..

Woman2: Really?

MN: Now, was St Luke's Episcopal did they have a choir was that a relatively big part of it?

Eddie: No, no it wasn't a big part of it. It was more of a social thing, and we were act-a-likes.

Courtney: That wasn't St Luke's that *was* PS 78, that I was talking about.

MN: Ok, but the church.

Courtney: The church was like a mile away from where we lived.

Eddie: That was the center of our social life up in the Bronx. And then we shifted to Mt.

Vernon, my brother and all--

Courtney: Your brother did.

Eddie: My brother. And I went from Mt. Vernon also down to the Riverton and Harlem, and Convent Ave, and 555 Edgecomb Ave where Sugar Hill—*this was fifteen, sixteen...*

MN: So there was this whole awareness of where black middle-class communities were?

Courtney: Yes.

MN: And you were very aware of where these neighborhoods were in the city?

Eddie: Debutantes ball in Brooklyn with all the people from, all the Jack and Jill group from Brooklyn who I still know. *Alma Harrington, Beron Brown--*

MN: Where they from Crown Heights or from--

Eddie: No from Bed Stuy. We would go to parties out there and then Alma Harrington who married Beron Brown who was killed in *center city...*

Woman: And people's fathers had homes in Sag Harbor--

Eddie: They had--

MN: And Martha's Vineyard and Sag Harbor.

Eddie: Right, right.

MN: Ok.

Eddie: I have to go.

MN: Ok, thank you so much.

Eddie: Thank you.

MN: And I look forward to your book coming out.

Eddie: Yes I hope I get an agent.

MN: Right.

Courtney: Eddie take it easy.

Woman: Bye thank you.

MN: Yes it would be seventy eights, now one of the things that is sort of interesting to me here is the European connection that you know. That at least some of the people in this you know black middle-class community across, had a European connection felt very comfortable in Europe. Was, was that also there in your family?

Woman: One of my mother's brothers was trained as a classical theater. But of course where could he play he can't even play now. And he had a, he sang with the, I never get this right the Kentucky, it was this famous group that traveled around the United States. Anyway he eventually had a trio called Day Dawn and Dusk and they performed at for the Duke and Duchess of Windsor all the time at private parties. He lived in Sweden he lived in France, he was in the French underground.

MN: Wow.

Woman: He got a, what do you call it?

[Crosstalk]

Woman: Yes, and I have pictures of my grandmother with one of my other uncles who just died at a 103. And in Europe in Paris and in London, before World War II and I think a couple of the other brothers had gone. Yes, Coley, yes, so my uncle when he was in Paris was friends with Brick Top and Josephine Baker and what's his name that plays up here at the Carlyle.

Courtney: Bobby

Woman2: Bobby Short.

Woman: Bobby Short, although he thinks that Bobby Short's a lousy musician. But it was Paris in a very exciting time. And I only discovered about six months ago on the web *that* my uncle has a fan club.

MN: What's his name because we can look this up.

Woman: Ed Coleman.

MN: Ed Coleman.

Woman: And the group is Day Dawn and Dusk. And they have on the website video, it's not video, I mean it's clips from live performances!

MN: Now, was your uncle, was that part of the family ever in the Bronx?

Woman: No, my mother's family all lived in Manhattan except for us.

MN: Right.

Woman: And our orientation was always to Manhattan.

MN: Yes, because that is interesting because some of the people from Morrisania said that they were very much connected still connected to Harlem. Even when they were living in the Bronx. So, you know what kind of things did you do in Manhattan when you were growing up?

Woman: We used to, this was probably before I even knew Tony, with some of the girls. One of whom I had lunch with a few weeks ago. We would at eleven we were going to Broadway shows by ourselves.

Courtney: Wow.

MN: This was by subway?

Woman: By subway yes.

Courtney: Subway was pretty safe then.

MN: Yes.

Woman: And, but that was just for girls in my class. But our family, my mother still went to church, she didn't go to St Luke's.

MN: What church did she attend in Harlem?

Woman: St. Marks.

MN: St. Mark's Episcopal?

Woman: St. Mark's Methodist.

MN: Methodist, alright.

Woman: And several of my aunts and uncles live right across the street from the Church. My father's businesses were in Harlem.

MN: Right, now he owned?

Woman: He owned grocery meat markets until, so I gather I only learned this, until the Mafia drove him out of business because he was extremely successful. And they brought in these union people who, there was this ruling I understand. And I really, I haven't explored this at all. My father read Fortune Magazine, as I had said he had gotten his Masters from NYU in business administration. And this was before supermarkets were all proliferating around the country. And he instituted this open-shelve kind of thing in his stores. And the unions had a rule that for every open foot of shelve space you had to have so many employees. And it just made it economically unfeasible because he had to have all these people working, and that quite naturally defeated the purpose of having self-service markets.

MN: So what happened after his businesses--

Woman: He, I remember vaguely there was a bankruptcy thing. I don't really remember that at all, and then he became a butcher.

MN: And he worked in Manhattan?

Woman: Yes, and then he actually started working in the Bronx. Do you remember on Bathgate Ave? And he learned to speak Spanish.

Courtney: When was this? Because when I was living with Bobby he was still at home.

Woman: I know after that.

Courtney: After that.

Woman: Yes. And he became Spanish. [laughs] And, he was a union shop steward and all that.

MN: Now, how did you end up going to Europe?

Woman: Oh, it was just a normal thing for me, because so many people in my family, my mother's brothers and sisters had just--

MN: This is what you did after college you went to Europe?

Woman: Yes and it never occurred to me that, it was just something I did. It was nothing, and everyone I think I knew, our next-door neighbor, Edward's older sister Nanny had a Fulbright Scholarship.

Courtney: She was also in the Peace Corp I think.

Woman: No.

Courtney: She wasn't in the Peace Corp.

Woman: No, she had Fulbright's.

Courtney: Oh, was that what it was.

Woman: I think she's now gotten her third Fulbright, she's now seventy. And she just came back from Africa.

Courtney: Oh really?

Woman: Yes.

Woman2: You didn't get to read Edward's letters?

Courtney: One or two that's all.

Woman: They were very political family, and they were very into Black History and--

Courtney: Black everything.

Woman: Black -- back to Africa things, and they were very much focused on Africa. So we were always aware of it and talked about it and what not.

Courtney: But they would have to like, they would give like papers to the family like once a week or once a month, the kids would deliver a dissertation at the dinner table.

Woman2: What the Murrells?

Courtney: The Murrells yes.

Woman2: I didn't know that.

Courtney: Once a month or once a week or something, there was always some topic that they would assign and talk—*this is what I heard from the brother...*

MN: Right, now but you don't recall there weren't like when you were growing up lectures in your neighborhood or anything like that.

Courtney: No.

Woman2: There was a Community Center in Hillside, but what, and we also had a small branch of the Library in Hillside that was open to the public. I have no idea what went on in the Community Room.

Woman: Oh I went there for tap dancing lessons.

Woman2: Oh, well ok, and the Brownies were there.

Courtney: Political stuff no matter who you were we just didn't have it in those days it didn't exist.

Woman2: I mean nobody except maybe for the Party, nobody, there was *nobody*--

Courtney: And you never heard about the Party unless they wanted you to hear about them. It wasn't like it is today, of course we didn't have TV either.

MN: Yes.

Tony: I am trying to formulate a question and I don't know how to, going off on what Sylvia said about innocence is that have we in a way become self-conscious of our upbringing and the way we lived which to us was not out of the ordinary? I don't know if I am making sense.

MN: Yes I mean you were living something without putting *it* in to some global perspective--

Tony: Or political, racial--

MN: Or political--

Courtney: It's normal don't forget, what we went through is normal to us.

MN: Yes, right.

Tony: Right.

Courtney: What I see today makes us look like, whoa we were really lucky.

MN: Did you feel lucky in the way you were brought up?

SC: No.

Tony: Not at the time. No.

MN: Do you feel, at the time you just felt--

Tony: This is it this is the way it was.

Courtney: My father used to beat me you know pretty good when I did wrong. But there was an Italian kid across the street from, named *Gibbia* whose old man used to really beat him.

And one day he ran out, and chased him out in to the street, he was punching him, the kid was like twelve thirteen years old, punching him and kicking him and my father never did that.

And I felt really lucky at that time.

MN: But looking back do you feel like--

Woman: Very lucky.

MN: Very lucky to have grown up the way that you did?

Tony: Well I think of it not so much growing up the way we did but *that* we don't have to grow up today.

Courtney: You've got to remember when we grew up everybody had two parents.

MN: Yes.

Courtney: Except this kid here, he was the only one.

MN: He was brought up by his mother.

Courtney: By his mother yes, but everybody else had two parents. I never heard of a girl getting attacked, physically, sexually abused. It may have gone on, but I didn't know anything about it.

Tony: And we did have a pregnancy in the eighth grade, one of the twins, *I think--*one of the Cardone twins? Somebody got pregnant.

Courtney: See well you are a few years younger than I am, because when I was going to school nobody got pregnant.

Tony: Yes, there was no sex.

Courtney: There was no sex right.

Tony: Nobody knew what sex was. [laughs]

MN: But something, the idea that you know and there has been a lot written about it that your being put, you getting peer pressure not to be smart that was you that you know

there's this whole thing that people have written about. And some inner-city communities, if a kid does well he's going to be made fun of or even attacked and accused of acting white. You know that--

Courtney: Acting white?

MN: Yes, if they're doing well in school.

SC: That's something, I mean it's totally foreign to me.

Courtney: That wouldn't fly, because we had too many white people in the school. That wouldn't fly well. We were really *in* a minority then, we weren't even ten percent.

MN: But it sounds like people grew up with pretty strong egos, and a lot of self-confidence and a sense that they could do anything they wanted to do.

Tony: Yes, well just about everybody, everybody on *Fish Ave.*'s parents went to college. Well, one--

Courtney: Mine didn't.

Tony: One or the other.

Courtney: Well my mother did yes.

Tony: You're mother had a Masters Degree from Columbia.

Courtney: After she got married.

Tony: That's alright.

SC: She still had it. Think about the *times*, I mean that's what sort of makes me wonder-

Courtney: What?

Tony: What?

SC: I don't know how to say it, I don't know how--

Courtney: Just say it.

SC: I can't because I sort of don't know how to phrase it.

Courtney: Don't phrase it just say it. I mean we'll work on it.

SC: Was that world, basically the ordinary? And what's going on today is all screwed up?

Courtney: That was ordinary for then, this is ordinary for now. *It's different...*

Tony: Different, it' a different world different things.

Courtney: I've got here in my pocket a telephone.

SC: Enough, I know, I know, I know--

Courtney: It's a different world. I spoke to Sylvia twice on the way down here to tell her where I was. I'm in the car.

SC: I know and I said call Courtney in the car, I know I know.

Courtney: Impossible in the old days.

SC: That's not what I mean.

Courtney: But all these things change your life.

Tony: Everything has changed.

Courtney: Everything. When I first got my first Italian car I had to get parts for it. I had to get an Italian to read, to decipher the language find out what I wanted. Had to go to the bank and get an international money order, I had to schlep over to the Post Office, all of this to mail to get the money over there. A year ago I had to buy something from Great Britain I called up from the phone gave the guy my number and two days, ten days later the thing

showed up. It is a different world.

Woman: And we weren't corrupted by all the incredible violence on television.

Woman2: I think maybe that somewhere in there is really what the answer is.

Courtney: We had one serial killer, Howard Unruh. Remember him? That's the only one though, for years.

MN: And it sounds like there just wasn't much violence in your environment, not in the street, not in the school.

SC: No, there was, there was Mafia. Because, I mean there were Italian Italians across the street from our high school that lived in tarpaper huts with their goats.

Tony: Victory formerly Victory Gardens.

SC: But that's where they lived.

Courtney: No, no not Victory Gardens, these were--

SC: They weren't Victory Gardens.

Courtney: No these were not Victory Gardens. *This was home...*

SC: They lived there, Tony.

Tony: No but that whole thing--

MN: This was across from Evander.

Courtney: This was not Victory Garden this is where they lived, this was home.

SC: This is where they lived what do you mean?

Tony: No, I know but I'm thinking it started that planted rock.

SC: No they were just poor.

MN: They were very poor people.

SC: And I mean our neighbor, the people that Courtney mentioned the only Italians on our

block, we all entered our houses from the front. They used their side entrance, which I never even thought about until somebody mentioned that.

Courtney: That's true they used the side entrance, which was on another street.

SC: So that they didn't have to deal with the people on our block, well their block. But that--

Courtney: That is very interesting, I've never heard it put that way but it's true.

SC: But down the street from them were Italians that didn't speak English I mean they--

Courtney: Yes tons of them.

SC: Tons of them.

Courtney: Tons of them.

SC: And I remember one woman who lived behind us coming and bringing my father, and all she could say was "Give me Red." And she'd give my father so many red wines.

Courtney: Red wine. [laughs]

SC: They couldn't speak English.

Courtney: On our block where we lived, and this is facing North of the school, over there was Hillside Homes which is mostly Jewish. And over here were the private houses which were mostly Italians and a couple of Italian delis over here, and the Jewish delis out there, so we had the benefit of three cultures.

SC: Yes we really did, and didn't even know it.

Tony: And the violence was the sort of, you know the sort of gangs, like the Wanderers, the Wanderers was Fordham Rd.

MN: The movie, yes.

Tony: You know but it didn't, you know I remember in high school they used to what, the rumors were that the Fordham Baldies were going to come....

Courtney: You know you bring that up and that is just occurred to me, when you mentioned these guys from Fordham, the Fordham Baldies. *The word was out* that they were going to come up and beat us up?

Woman: They were always going to come up. [laughs]

Courtney: Cause we were talking to all these white girls from Evander. And they were going to come up on this particular night because the Fordham Baldies were a bad bunch of guys, they had a bad rep. So the night this was going to happen, we all disappeared, I think we went to Bop City or something, Birdland, we got out the block. And then we never heard about that again.

Woman: Right the same thing when they were going to come to Evander, and cut off all the hair I guess of all of the white girls who dated the black guys.

Courtney: Really?

Woman: No, it was like, but nobody paid any attention to that.

MN: There was rumors that the baldies were coming to Brooklyn just to shave everybody's heads

[laughter]

MN: They actually, yes they actually canceled school one whole afternoon. I was in the fifth grade and I was a lieutenant in the safety patrol. And I had to stand in the street while all the kids went home. And I just remember being terrified that the baldies *were going to get me*.

[Laughter]

Courtney: Get there before you get, before they catch you. [laughs]

MN: Yes, and I was, I put on this brave front I was scared.

Woman: Do you remember Billy Blankenchip?

Woman2: I would like to meet a Fordham Baldy.

Woman: He actually killed somebody, and I think he may have lived either in Hillside or he lived across from the Italian houses.

Courtney: I never heard the name.

Women: Billy Blankenchip.

Woman2: The name is familiar but I have no idea.

Woman: He murdered somebody! And I don't know, it stands out in my mind because he was like the first young person from our neighborhood and also from our neighborhood who really went bad. And of course all the papers thought he *was* a choirboy, and he was so wonderful, and he killed somebody.

Courtney: Well that's a new one on me.

Woman2: But Courtney dated white girls.

Courtney: Yes.

Woman2: And they were--

Courtney: Well Renee's father told Renee that she couldn't see me anymore. From around 205<sup>th</sup> St she lived. And they said this girl whose father owned the dress store on Seymour Ave and the Post Rd. What was the name of that dress store...you girls probably *can think of it*--

Woman: Big and Little?

Courtney: No it was a name, it was a family name.

Woman: Not Zimmerman's?

Courtney: Whatever I dated her once or twice. But those, I only dated two; she was in '78 that's right. And this other girl Renee was from Evander.

Woman2: Well who was the woman you're still friendly with that lives in Florida from high school? The one we went and took pictures of her old house?

Courtney: We took pictures of--?

Woman2: Her house where she used to live in, Westchester.

Courtney: Harriett *Lowell*-- She was not a girlfriend.

Woman2: Ok.

Courtney: She was in the crew, there used to be these two sororities of girls. One was called the Kroywen's, which is New York backwards.

[Laughter]

Courtney: I forget what the other one was called.

Woman: I never heard that. [laughs]

Courtney: And the Kroywen's had all the best-looking girls.

Woman2: Were they all white?

Courtney: They were all Jews, most of these were Jewish. And the other ones I can't think of their names were like the second tier, the B grade. [laughs] Harriett she was like no taller than you. And there were all these big, like Barbara Straus was like nearly as tall as that. *All kinds of curves*...And these girls and I were all really friendly, so when I ran for GOP president, GO president.

**Woman2: GOP President?** [Group Laughter]

Courtney: These girls put me in, I got in I think 47 or 48, I got 47 or 48 votes and the next person got I think 17 votes. So I won by a landslide, and Harriet *Lowell* is a person who was not one of my buddies then. I knew her and she was in the thing, but I didn't I didn't do, you know talk to her that much because she wasn't as good looking as the rest of them.

Courtney: Now, she's the one that I talk to the most, through e-mail.

Woman: I thought, you are still in contact with Barbara aren't you?

Courtney: Barbara who?

Woman: Your Barbara.

Courtney: Oh, but Barbara is not from Evander.

Woman: No.

Courtney: She's from Detroit. Yes, I'm still in touch with her, 400 pounder all 400 pounds of her.

Woman: But we are all still in touch with people from high school and elementary school.

MN: So you still keep up with everybody?

Woman: Yes we had an elementary school reunion. I mean not a reunion, reunion, there were eight *of us*....

Woman2: Oh right when we went to lunch.

Woman: Right, we met here, one came from Boston, Matty came from Georgia, and *wherever*--

Courtney: One of my guys from high school, Mark Roner is a mayor somewhere out in the west, Idaho Iowa some place like that. And Robert Mitski from '78 is a mayor down in Florida.

Woman: Really?

Woman2: But it was like in those days a neighborhood school, our elementary school pulled from maybe a three-block radius.

MN: Right so everybody knew everybody.

Courtney: Yes.

Woman2: Even at our high school reunion, which was only like a 150 kids out of a thousand graduates. But a goodly number of them it was like having an elementary school reunion.

Woman: Because we'd gone to elementary school.

Woman2: Yes, I don't basically have any high school friends or college friends because I went to school with them.

Courtney: I am looking at all of these activities, these anti-Semitism that you see here in NY now, they are bombing the synagogues and they are sticking up the Rabbi and all this good stuff and that was totally fine in our day back then. Totally I mean not even dreamt of, I'd never heard of anything like that till lately. Especially up there in the Bronx, it did not exist.

Woman: I was thinking about release time, I don't know if they still have that at school.

Courtney: What is that?

Woman2: You know when the kids went off.

MN: Religious instruction, yes we had that.

Courtney: Yes we had that, sure we had that.

Woman: Kids went to school or wherever they went Hebrew School.

Courtney: We had the Jewish kids go out--

Woman: And the Catholic kids went to *wherever they went*--

Courtney: Catholic kids, yes that's right.

Woman: And it was-- nobody thought anything about it.

Courtney: No it's just the way it was.

Woman: Except that we were still in school. [laughs] But it wasn't like the Catholic kids are leaving, or the Jewish kids-- it was--

Courtney: Yes.

Woman2: I remember going to St Phillip and James when Cardinal Spellman came to bless the school.

Woman: Oh my god.

MN: Wow.

Woman2: And I practically threw up over the fact that they were kissing his ring, because you didn't do that.

Courtney: But they believed all that good stuff.

Woman2: What? Right.

Courtney: They believed all that good stuff. It gives them a warm feeling.

Courtney: And they could all brag about it, I kissed his ring.

Woman2: Right.

Courtney: Can't knock that.

Woman: My mother told me, my mother died I think in '88 and not long before she died *she told me--*

Courtney: She couldn't have died in '88, cause mine died in '88.

Woman: So when did she die?

Courtney: I don't know, did they die the same year?

Woman2: I can't remember if she died--

Woman: I don't know whatever '87 maybe she died, she died before your mom.

Courtney: Yes she must have died in '87.

Woman: Yes she died, but she told me she was head of the PTA. And she told me that Max B. Siegel the president, the principal of PS 78 had said to my mother don't be friendly with the Heiseler's, cause they're Communists! And my mother just tells me this when I am grown up.

Courtney: Well she's smart, you didn't--

Woman: Well of course not, and she could have cared less you know it didn't matter to my parents.

Woman!: Well so that it is more, think of it, this I 1952,3 probably around 3 or 4 I can't remember exactly when we moved to the Bronx. Height of McCarthy, but a white principal is telling the black head of the PTA don't talk to these people because they are Communists, I mean this is completely--

Courtney: Probably worse with blacks.

Woman: Oh definitely.

Woman2: Right, that's right.

Courtney: Yes well they had it under control, they never had the Commies under control.

MN: You know, who lives on Fish Ave now?

Woman: I don't know.

Woman2: No one knows.

Courtney: I go through there from time to time, and a whole bunch of black people who I have absolutely no idea. I can tell you this I just finished this dinner, three years in the Bronx. And that whole entire neighborhood is black, which used to be all this sprinkles of different races is now ninety-nine percent black. And from what I can see ninety-nine

percent of them are from the Caribbean.

MN: Right, *some* good West Indian restaurants.

Courtney: Yes, Jamaican and all this other good stuff.

Woman: We haven't been to Hillside probably in ten years.

Courtney: You don't want to go, trust me.

Woman: Well, I, we were there—

Courtney: You don't want to go back.

Woman: Well we were there it was like stopped, there was like a pretzel vender on my

block, on the block that I grew up with a cart. And they sort of said why are you here?

Meaning this carload of white folk. Why have you come here? You know I said because

I used to live over there. They couldn't believe it.

Woman: It's they have now changed the name, it is not called Hillside, did you know that it's not Hillside?

Courtney: No, what is it now?

Woman: Eastchester Heights?

Courtney: Yes, you're right that's right I heard that.

Woman: Eastchester Gardens, something bizarre.

Courtney: Eastchester Heights I've heard that.

Woman: *But* I've always had the feeling, maybe it's coming back up but that it sort of got to be it was like a public housing project.

Courtney: That's right, it looks like it, it looks like it.

Woman2: The only person that, it just came to me, that still lived in Hillside Homes, when did Mrs. Hillerman die? We went to the funeral. Ten years ago?

Courtney: Easy.

Woman2: Martha Brocke, remember, Martha's father was a professor at Manhattan, was it Manhattanville? What is that school?

MN: There is a Manhattan and a Manhattanville, there are two schools two colleges.

Woman2: Not the music one the other one.

Woman: Manhattanville.

MN: Manhattan.

Woman: Manhattanville. Ok I think he was a math professor, her brother is like some big shot physicist. She still lived in Hillside Homes, all these years.

Courtney: She must pay thirty dollars a month right?

Woman2: Probably, and she had a son.

Courtney: Was she on Fish Ave?

Woman2: Yes.

Courtney: First house right?

Woman2: Yes. And they still live there.

Courtney: Oh and she's married? Or she had a child you say?

Woman2: Yes.

MN: So of your group when did the last of this original group leave Fish Ave? The last of the families you knew move somewhere else?

Woman: When did your mom move to Fairfield?

Courtney: She moved in '72. *When she left the blacks were gone...*

Woman: Wow.

MN: And when did your family leave?

Woman: Probably '82.

MN: '82? And when did your family leave Hillside?

Woman2: It was thirty-five, roughly between thirty-five and forty years ago. That was *sixty--*

Courtney: You're going to make us do the, figure out the years.

Woman2: No, sixty-five, sixty-six-- about sixty-eight, sixty-nine.

Woman: But yes by the time my mother left--

Courtney: She was one of the last ones right?

Woman: Right, yes.

MN: And did she feel unsafe? Or was it just, just that the neighborhood had changed so much socially?

Woman: It had really changed, I mean it had become really--

Courtney: Well my mother had told me before she left, she felt a threat from street thugs. She was coming out of the hairdressers, the hairdresser was on Boston Post Rd, Wilson Ave, or Block, Balk Ave one of those streets. So it would be four or five blocks of where we lived. And she said, when she said, no she said it was on Gun Hill Rd. that's right. And she was walking up one of those streets, Balk Ave or Wilson Ave. and she noticed these two black guys following her, young guys. And she was, where she was going they had no business going anyway it was like, so she said something's wrong here. So she is walking-- and

they're following her, so she says ok that's it. She turns around and walks toward them, they were so flustered (END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO; BEGINNING OF TAPE TWO SIDE ONE) that they just parted and she walked in between them. She walked back to the beauty parlor and she called a cab to take her home.

MN: Yes, and this was in the early seventies?

Courtney: This was in the early seventies, she left in seventy-two.

MN: Now--

Woman: When was it that the policemen were shot on Seymour Ave? That was within the past ten years.

Courtney: Yes, he's doing back then though.

MN: No--

Woman: Back in the day.

MN: Had your mothers ever been robbed or none of that?

Courtney: No.

Woman: No nothing like that.

Courtney: Mine was the closest one to any peril.

MN: Now is there anything that we haven't covered that you'd like to say? You know in terms of an overview or reflection? You know we've done about--

Courtney: The only thing that I have to say about the whole thing is that based on what I've learned since then it was a wonderful time. We were all very very lucky children to have been raised in this safe environment. With, from my point of view, a lack of friction between groups. I couldn't, I can't think of anything that was missing, I really can't.

Woman2: This was not a neighborhood of like the Brooklyn stories, of the Jewish kids walking home from school being beaten up by the Irish or the Italians. Here people were not--

Courtney: --Into that.

Woman2: It was, in a way it really was an ideal, an *idyllic* place coupled with the fact that before they started the block busting and Co-op City and all this crap, they had, my brother would go snaking! I mean we lived in New York City but he would go snaking because it was semi-rural where we were.

Courtney: There was one other thing.

Woman: Crabbing and--

Courtney: We could catch, one of my friends had shot a deer in the Bronx. Came down the Merritt Parkway--

Woman2: Oh my God!

Courtney: When I was young about twelve, thirteen. My friend's father shot this deer in the Bronx.

Woman2: I know our neighbors went deer hunting, but--

Courtney: In the Bronx over by Merritt Parkway, and you could do fishing. Where now Co-op City stands, Skippy used to go fishing for these little *killies*--

Woman2: Eastchester Creek.

Courtney: What?

Woman2: It was Eastchester Creek right?

Courtney: Yes I guess that is what it was I don't know. But he used to catch them and bring them home to Fish Ave. and have them up on a little aquarium, it was idyllic. I mean you couldn't have--

Woman2: What are those, what is it called when you make the potatoes in the can?

Woman: Yes.

MN: Mickey Roasters? Mickey roast, we did that in Brooklyn too.

Courtney: Yes sure.

Woman2: Yes, I mean we did just such--

Courtney: It was great, I mean you can't of a thing that--

Woman2: And it *was* family orientated, everybody looked after everybody.

Woman: It was like my entire life was seemed to be spent on her stoop of her house.

Courtney: Yes, a lot of times the entertainment on the stoop, out in front of the house. It was anything that you could think of that was good we had.

MN: wow.

Woman: And we played jump rope, I remember Eddie, I don't know what in particular, why I remember this. But I can remember Eddie jumping double-dutch. Boys, yes the boys and the girls played double-dutch.

Courtney: We never jumped, we left that to the girls.

Woman: But they did, we played hide and seek.

Courtney: They have, what do they call them now? International contests of double-dutch.

MN: Yes, oh yes, it's a big thing. Now did you play stoopball?

Woman: Yes.

Courtney: Stoopball, but we played more, see right across the street we had a schoolyard.

Woman2: Yes so we played in the schoolyard.

Courtney: We played stoopball, but more we'd play softball in that schoolyard.

MN: Yes, softball in the schoolyard. Did you play punchball? Or that wasn't a big thing.

Courtney: No we played softball.

MN: You played softball.

Courtney: Every now and then we'd play in Hillside, we'd play stickball, but not too much.

Woman: And tennis, tennis against the back, those tennis courts at the end of the playgrounds on the--

Courtney: Well you get fancy you go in to a regular playground, that is fancy, we're talking about the street.

Woman: Well the Hillside playground.

Courtney: But that is a cutoff from the *story*--

MN: Well you know it's, it's very moving to me to hear this. I mean it's you know--

Courtney: You couldn't *have found* a better place to grow up.

Woman2: Yes, really, I mean Tony was saying what went on in the community. They, I used to go in the fifth sixth and seventh grades to social dancing, you know where the boys are on one side and the girls-- *And you know they'd make us dance together*... I mean I remember learning to tango.

Courtney: On Seymour Ave.

Woman2: Yes. And to go to tap dancing lessons.

Courtney: I can do that Russian dance where the men get down--

MN: Oh the Kazatska oh you could do that?

Courtney: They taught me how to do that.

Woman: We all had piano lessons, or what did you play, you played the--

Courtney: I played the clarinet and the sax.

Woman: Yes, everybody played something.

Courtney: Clarinet and the trombone.

Woman: I don't know, people were just very different--

Courtney: It was Norman Rockwell.

Woman: Why?

Courtney: It was almost Norman Rockwell.

MN: Yes, and it was interracial and multi-group--

Courtney: Without tension, without tension.

Woman: I had a friend, Cathy Kennedy, and of course I realize now that her father was a drunk. And her mother I think must have been a washerwoman. And, but Cathy was always at our house, Mrs. Kennedy would come, I think my parents used to feed them. *[Group Laughter]* I mean now that I think about it—*I think my mother used to give them food...*

Courtney: Well your mother would feed anybody let's face it. She was always feeding people.

MN: Wow.

Woman: People, I mean everybody's father worked.

Courtney: Right, there were no bums. *No one was on welfare...*

Woman2: I mean the other thing, the other thing that is also interesting when I think about it now is that the mothers worked.

Courtney: Yes that's true.

Woman: All the mothers worked. All white mothers worked, black ones.

Courtney: Black mothers. Yes, everybody worked. The two parents working, because they were all latchkey kids. Well Ms. Thomas didn't work, but on the other hand Ms. Thomas was in the middle of the block, she's the one with the seven kids.

Woman: Nine.

Courtney: Nine, and she was home all the time. So she could keep a weathered eye out on the rest of us, and of course if you didn't--

Woman: But everybody had--

Courtney: If you did something wrong she would tell your parents.

MN: Now did any of the families have cleaning people?

Woman: Yes.

MN: Who was doing the cleaning?

Courtney: In my house the family was doing the cleaning, she might have had it but I didn't have it.

Woman2: No, my father would clean. [laughs]

MN: No but would--

Woman: The Murrell's did.

Woman2: Yes?

Courtney: They had a cleaning lady?

Woman: Yes.

Courtney: I didn't know that. My family we cleaned, I cleaned mostly which is why I hate to clean now.

Woman: Oh is that why?

[Laughter]

Woman2: But you know it-was the kind of thing where people would get allowances and you did chores it was the whole thing.

Courtney: Yes.

Woman: You'd go and buy milk.

Courtney: Nobody got a car.

Tony: Sylvia was the first one.

Courtney: Sylvia was the first one who got a car

Tony: Your little Volkswagen.

MN: What year was that in the sixties?

SC: 1960--I guess 1960. My parents gave me a brand new red convertible Volkswagen.

MN: Whoa.

SC: It was hot stuff. But we were lucky and we did, we were just very lucky. We always had people at our house, I think every Sunday we had company for dinner.

Courtney: Your mother was always cooking, always cooking.

SC: My parent's friends we always cooked in the backyard in the summers. And my parents insisted that I always bring my friends home, no matter who what what condition they were in.

Courtney: Smart, smart.

SC: What ever you do, do it at home.

Courtney: Yes, right do it here.

SC: I don't know it was a very different time I am very glad I grew up then.

MN: Yes.

Courtney: That's why when I look at social things that are going on today, it's just, I just, it's so alien to me. I mean I just I can't imagine living the way these people live today. Just very sad.

MN: Yup, and well listen thank you so much. I mean I'm very moved by what you said. I mean it's I'm feeling like little shivers in me. And you know thank you for your contribution I learned a tremendous amount. I think some of my students are going to enjoy actually hearing this. And I will send you both transcriptions and tapes when we have them made, so you will have copies of this.

Tony: Yes I want to hear--one of the things we used to do, Matty and Sylvia and I would sit in her basement and we would tape our conversations. And we would play them back and then we would tape the-- you don't remember that? We would make comments about the conversations and tape that too.

SC: Really? I thought we *had some*--

MN: That's alright, but Sylvia you'll get all the addresses for me. And you know, the transcription will probably take about a month to do. But the tapes will be done within a couple of weeks, and I'll send them--

Courtney: If you have any questions, any further questions send them along.

MN: Yes, absolutely. And again thank you so much.

(END OF SESSION)