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Mark Naison (MN): Hello. This is the seventieth interview of the Bronx African American History Project and we're here with Ronald Carson, who grew up in the Patterson Houses and went on to a career in technology. Okay. When did your family first move to the Bronx?

Ron Carson (RC): In the late 1940's.

MN: Where did they move to the Bronx from?

RC: My dad brought the family up from Lynchburg, VA.

MN: And, how did he find the Bronx? Did you have relatives who lived here?

RC: You know dad really never discussed that. We did have, I guess family and friends that resided up in this area. He came up here to find employment after finishing his, I guess, career with the military beyond World War II.

MN: Now, was your father in the African American unit in the military?

RC: Yes, he was. He was an MP, a sergeant MP.

MN: And was he college educated?

RC: Not at all. He had started college and then he left for the military.

MN: Now where did your family move to? What, do you remember what house or what block or - -

RC: Sure. We lived at 967 Tinton Avenue approximately--about 163rd Street in the South Bronx.

MN: And your family - - did your mother work?

RC: Initially no she didn't and then once we all started school and it was five of us, mom took a little part-time job on with Bloomingdale's in the notions department.

MN: What year were you born?

RC: September 8th, 1947.

MN: 1947, okay. Now what year did your family move to the Patterson Houses?

RC: October, 1953.

MN: Do you have any recollections of Tinton Avenue? You know from your early childhood?

RC: Sure, the biggest recognition - - the thing that I recognize most is I remember on my fifth birthday, my Uncle Spencer gave me a set of "Hopalong Cassidy" guns, [laughter] And I went outside to play and a young fellow came running by and he was chasing somebody and he said "Hey, Can I hold your guns? I want to chase that guy with them and I'll bring them back to you." And I remember he left with my guns on my birthday and he never came back with them. And that was really devastating for me. Across the street was the Manderson family and we interrelated with them quite frequently. We attended church in that vicinity.

MN: What church did your family attend?

RC: I can't - - it was a Baptist church. And I can't - -

Jim Pruitt (JP): Where was it?

RC: It was on Boston Road at about 167th Street, 168th Street.

JP: In the building with the tower theater?

RC: No the church was actually a separate facility there and I can find out the name of the church for you.

JP: Across the street from Morris? No.

RC: No, it was on Boston Road itself and I remember it was a coal yard across the street from the church and they have all these old coal trucks with the giant chains on it and I remember seeing all the vehicles come there and load up. (laughter)

MN: Now what was the composition of Tinton Avenue? Was it predominately African American or were there White and Latino families also?

RC: No Latinos that I recall but there were Anglos living there. The Mullers owned the grocery store on the corner and then there was the family that owned the local drugstore. It was a community related - - a community environment okay? We had the ice truck come around and the wagon - - the fruit wagon used to come around. So it was a mixed - - quite mixed neighborhood.

MN: Were there a lot of - - were people out in the street a lot? Were the kids playing ball in the street? Did adults socialize outside?

RC: Not that I recall, no. I'd have to say occasionally, you were--you hung out on the stoop but it was frowned on, it really was. Sunday was the day when everybody went outside. Saturdays and Sundays they went out and did the local shopping in the local stores and - -

MN: Right, now was the housing mostly the five story walk up tenements or were there private houses and elevator apartment buildings?

RC: I don't recall any elevator apartments at all in the area but I - - there were, five story buildings as well as private homes across the street from us.

MN: Now, when your family moved into the Patterson Houses was this seen as a step up, was it seen as a very positive thing? What was the - - you know if you can recall, was this an exciting time?

RC: Well we were forced to move. The area that we resided in was going to be demolished and they were putting up some projects in that area.

MN: Was that - - were they going to build the Forest Houses?

RC: Correct.

JP: Oh, okay

MN: So you were on the North side of 163rd Street and Tinton?

RC: Correct.

MN: Which is where the Forest were going to be built?

RC: Right exactly. We were a little taken back. Mom, from my conversations with Mom, we were looking to move further north, actually. Castle Hill, the projects up there were really nice. The houses on Pelham Parkway were really nice but we weren't left with an alternative. So moving *down* to the projects was a little scary for all of us. Not because of anything other than we were moving, relocating.

MN: Right, did Patterson have a bad reputation at that time, do you think?

RC: Not that I was aware of. It was housing built for WWII veterans coming out. Actually I loved it, it was pretty well integrated when you look at it now. I'd said about one quarter of the families living there to about one third were whites and we had a few Hispanics, you know from the big migration from Puerto Rico was just taking place, and then Blacks. In the building I lived in at 291, I would say a third of the building was other than Afro-American.

MN: Now, did - - your family - - Nathan told me that your family had a lot of Indian ancestry?

RC: Absolutely. The background of the family is Olumbe Indian from North Carolina, Cherokee and Blackfoot. And we believe - - my mother was orphaned at the age of about 4 months old. Her mother passed away at that point. But my grandfather, **Claudosca Revels**, was a professional barber, he used to cut hair for all the Black actors and people of stardom, I guess, *at that point*. So he traveled around the country. So my mom was always left with some individual to take care of her.

MN: Now, was this Indian identification something hard to sustain in New York City? You know - -

RC: Yes actually, you were better off being Black than being Native American at that point in life. So we *always* grew up Black. We didn't grow up Native American. And it's just in the last 20 years I'd say where Native Americans have been accepted in society. So the transition is there but we still consider ourselves Afro American.

MN: And that identification - - as Afro American was consolidated by church, sociability, family, friends.

RC: Absolutely, it's amazing how your association with people of the same heritage, background, coloring, fair skinned blacks, if you want to call them that. Okay, so there was always that clique of individuals and not that anybody was prejudiced against this color or that color, it just seemed like you migrated together. And supported each other.

MN: Now, when you moved to the Patterson Houses, were you attending public school in the Tinton Avenue area?

RC: Yes, I believe it was PS 33.

JP: 23?

RC: 23.

MN: And what street was that on?

JP: 165th

RC: 165th Street and Tinton.

MN: And you were in first grade or kindergarten.

RC: Kindergarten at the time. And I left at the beginning of - - starting first grade.

MN: Now was there much of a difference between PS 23 and PS 18 when you made that transition?

RC: Yes, very much so. From a social perspective, the teachers at PS 23 knew my mom and my dad. My sisters had gone through PS 23 - -

MN: So you were the youngest in the family?

RC: No, there're five of us, two sisters older than me and two sisters younger than me. So my two older sisters had attended. And it's ironic that the principal and the assistant principal from 23 went on to PS 18 where I did the remainder of my grammar school studies.

MN: So there was a - - but not being known was something that made an impression on you?

RC: In PS 18 it was the fear of entering into the unknown. So yes, we're relocated, I'm in a new school, I'm unfamiliar with the surroundings, and PS 18 was a brand new school so that was kind of nice in that perspective. Whereas 23 was the old traditional structure that was probably put up in the early 1920's.

MN: Right. Now where - - what building in Patterson did you move into?

RC: 291 East 143rd Street.

MN: And, so was this on the North side or the Southside?

RC: The North side.

MN: So you were in the same side with Nathan - -

RC: Nathan *and the* Dukes, and Haj, Tiny Archibald, Babar, Owen, *the Dynamites*

(Laughter) - -

MN: Now how did you - - how quickly did you make friends in the new place? Was that a slow process or a quick process?

RC: I think it was relatively fast believe it or not. It was the Babbish's down on the second floor - - Billy Babbish's family. I remember we moved in right before Halloween so Halloween, everybody was running throughout the building, and around the neighborhood. So, that's what sort of opened up the doors for me.

MN: Now was Patterson at that time a well kept environment in terms of surroundings?

RC: Absolutely, you couldn't sit on the stoops, you couldn't sit outside on the chains. You know they had the chain fencing around the projects. Forget about going on the grass. We weren't allowed to play stick ball. It was a lot that had been converted. We call it the parking lot. But it was a basketball court, it was four courts there, and we were restricted as to what *type* of sports we could actually play in the parking lot. If the housing police caught us playing stick ball in there they would take our stick ball away, they could take the ball away from us as such. The hallways were kept immaculate. *I think the hallways*, honest to God, I think they were mopped twice a day and swept twice a day. And we weren't allowed to play in the hallways. So we were always sort of on the lookout for the police department and even the individuals that worked inside, they kept us out. And there was one individual, or two individuals, that were assigned to each building. And the buildings were immaculate; the apartments were kept very well. It was nice conditions to live in.

MN: Yes, and were most of the people friendly or were there some exceptions to that? What was the general atmosphere?

RC: The general atmosphere was very friendly. It was a very family-oriented building. We - - many times, because there wasn't any air conditioning, everybody had their door propped open with a chair or something and the conversation would go from apartment to apartment

[laughter]. It was amazing, and I lived on the side where the elevator was and whoever was walking toward the elevator would say "hi" and we would look out in the hallway and we would say "hi" to someone. A lot of time we played in the hallways when the weather was inclement or it was just a social gathering place.

MN: Now, was this an environment of mostly intact families?

RC: Absolutely. Divorce, really - -I can't think of any of the families that didn't have a dad and a mom.

MN: Do you have any recollections of what were the major kind of jobs that the men were doing? What sort of work did your father do at that time?

RC: My father worked for the New York City Transit Authority. Initially, he was a bus driver out in Brooklyn and he drove one of the old converted buses. It was electric and it worked off the power lines. And then daddy became ill with cancer and he was no longer allowed - - so he became a token booth clerk and that was a great experience. Mr. Hodge across the hallway raised dad. He worked for Manhattan Hospital. Mrs. Merrick, she worked for - - she was a nurse. The Georgianis, Mr. Georgiani was a tech at the time. Actually he developed the first, not microchip, transistor!

MN: Really?!

RC: Yes. I think he was with RCA. Most of the families, I wouldn't say professional, but steady jobs and as such. So everybody had a good job.

MN: Now were there a lot of organized programs for kids?

RC: Yes, yes. I mean afterschool programs--there was the Patterson Center. So we could go to the Patterson Center on weekends and hang out there and play ping pong and such. PS 18 always had something going on there. The local churches - -I went to the Congregational church and there was - -

MN: Now where was the church you went to?

RC: 143rd Street and Willis Avenue. And Reverend Johnson and Reverend Hardy were there and there was always - -

MN: This was a Congregational church?

JP: That was a Congregational church.

RC: Yes.

JP: I think it's Methodist now.

RC: No it's still a Congregational church [crosstalk]. There's the Willis Avenue Methodist right down the block.

MN: And they're still a Congregational church?

RC: Absolutely. I went there to visit. I spoke at the church a couple of years ago.

MN: Wow. And did your family attend that church?

RC: Absolutely

MN: So that became your family's church?

RC: Yes, exactly. My father came up as a Baptist, and we tried Willis Avenue Baptist, but the environment was more conducive at a Congregational church and actually my dad was the one that dragged us to church every Sunday, went out there. Mom came along afterwards, but it was always Daddy. All five of us attended church and we went through the whole process, and getting baptized, and, oh God I can't even think of any - - but you know Communion, Confirmation, and the whole.

MN: Were there any teachers at PS 18 who made a big impression on you in elementary school?

RC: [laughs] Negative and positive, [laughter] MN:

[laughs] All the above.

RC: Yes, I'll never forget Ms. Katz from the third grade. I guess I ran my mouth a lot and I was always in trouble with her. And almost every day I had to stay in after school. Second grade teacher - - she supported me a lot. I got in trouble once. We - - during the summer we always played stick ball or punch ball or off the point at the school yard where the kindergarten was. The ball went on the roof and I climbed up the school roof to get it. It was just a one story building and I remember later on that year - - one of the kids with the monitor, remember with the white belts - -

MN: Oh, I had one of those.

JP: I had one of those, too.

JP: Triple A.

RC: Yes, triple A. He identified me and several other students as breaking into the school and you know, in the second grade, seeing a police officer come into the classroom was quite

scary. But the teacher supported me and she realized that wasn't my forte, so we walked around the school. My grandmother came and supported us and let us - - you know, "I didn't think Ronald would do anything like that." Third grade was Katz. 4th grade, my 4th grade teacher, God bless her, wherever she is to this day. She recognized that I was socializing with the wrong individuals at the time. Booby, Whitey, Ernest, and one other individual that lived at 281, and she called me dad and said, "If Ronald hangs out *with* them, he's going to get himself in a lot of trouble." Well every one of those individuals is either dead or incarcerated.

MN: Well that's - - now how did that happen? You know that - - because my parents were always very critical of me for hanging out with the wrong crowd. How - - at what age - - what is the dynamic that operated with you in terms of that particular cohort?

RC: Whitey, who had to be the white kid in the group, he always had money, he always had something [laughter] he was always out there. And I remember one time he - - everyday he would get a silver dollar - - and it turns out he was stealing his father's money, [laughter] And for some reason or another, my teacher, and that was Ms. Stamper actually, in the 4th grade, she recognized that I was a decent young man, and I think she just saw the difference in these individuals.

MN: Now was PS 18 like, tracked by academic level, you know like 1, 2, 3, 4, 5?

RC: Absolutely.

MN: And which track were you in?

RC: I was - - there was - - well, you were 4-1, 4-2, 4-3, 4-4; I was always in the second level. I was never in the top of the class.

MN: You were in 4-2?

RC: Right.

MN: And, was that - - was there a lot of testing, reading? Was this done on the basis of reading tests? Or - -

RC: You know, I never paid any attention to that. But I would think your general scores at the end of the semester, you know, whether you were an A, B, or C student - - and there was testing that took place.

MN: Now was academics something emphasized in your household? Or was this something that you kind of just picked up on your own?

RC: I would have to say it was 50-50. Academics and - - more than anything and I think it's very typical in people that grew up in the South or of Black origin, was respect. So 50% was applied to school and 50 was to respect your elders, the people in the neighborhood. We could never use profanity around anyone in the neighborhood. We couldn't speak back to our teachers. We - -

MN: So there was a real sense of this Southern, you know, ethic. Of, respect your elders, and treat everybody a certain way.

RC: Absolutely. Absolutely.

MN: And was that something you saw a lot in that Patterson environment?

RC: Yes, absolutely.

MN: At that time.

RC: Yes, absolutely.

MN: A lot - - people didn't talk - - if an elder corrected kids they wouldn't - -

RC: Elder, teacher, policeman. Anybody of authority of age. You never spoke back to them.

Never, never, never.

MN: And if you did would somebody - -

RC: You'd get popped upside your head by that individual, and then they would take you upstairs and you'd get popped upside your head by your mother and your father. And then you'd get punished.

JP: Were most of the people there in the Patterson, the black families, were they Southern origin or from the West Indies?

RC: The majority was Southern blacks. There were very few families, I would have to say, that came from the West Indies. The Hodges did. But you know what? It was amazing because race was never important back then as it has become something nowadays. I mean, it didn't make any difference what you were. You were a friend and that was it. So, the Hodges, I know were eating - - the food was a little different - -

MN: Now what was the food you ate in your house? Was it Southern cooking?

RC: Absolutely. Black eyed peas and rice, you know, traditional holiday foods, collard greens, macaroni and cheese, fried chicken - -

MN: Did they eat chitterlings at all or no?

RC: No we never - - (laughter) the Gilliams ate chitterlings. And that odor would migrate up in the building. We knew the Gilliams were having chitterlings, [laughter] But no we never went that far.

MN: Now what were the - - did the Hodges do jerk chicken and jerk pork?

RC: No, no, not at all. It wasn't - -I remember one time we ate at the Hodges' home and

[tape interruption]

MN: So - -

RC: In terms of ethnic foods.

-

MN: Ethnic foods as you experienced them.

RC: Yes, I - - you know the Hodges - - the food was a little different but nothing significant.

A little - - they always made the fish soup. Mrs. Hodges always made a fruit drink, and she would always let me know "Ronald, Ronald, I have your favorite drink." Cause I spent probably 80% of my life over Ray Hodges apartment [laughter]. You know, the sister, Bido would chase me out. She would say, "You don't live here." But the Hodges' home, I felt like I was at home.

MN: Now, you were saying in terms of the Cherokee Indian in your family?

JP: Yes, we can - -I mean it's not documented but we know that it existed. We know from all the relatives that we had Blackfoot on my grandfather's side. His mother was full-blooded Blackfoot.

MN: Now, going - - Now, were there any Latino families in your building with their own distinctive cooking?

RC: Yes. Again I never ate at any of their homes. The fifth floor, the fourth floor, and the third floor, and the first floor, were Latin families. And, they were great people. The Bertrand family was the first floor. Matter of fact, I still am in contact occasionally with the younger brother who - - me playing Zorro one time we were all at the beach - - and I was playing Zorro with the umbrella. And we started throwing the umbrella between each other's feet and I managed to get it to go into his foot and through his foot.

MN: Right. Now, were all of you like other kids in New York? Very much, the television shows, you know, Davy Crockett, Zorro, Hopalong Cassidy?

RC: Absolutely. We all had our favorite TV programs. Mine was Saturday morning. The Big Top. And, you know, "Get the best. Get the best. Get Sealtest ice cream." [laughter] Hopalong Cassidy. I loved Hopalong Cassidy. He was one of my heroes. And some of the other shows, of course. You know, one of us never really got to watch the show because they always had to hold the antenna, move it around.

MN: Now what about music? What sort of music did your parents like?

RC: My father was a diverse individual in terms of music - - That's where the line was drawn. We listened to rock and roll but we also listened to very contemporary music. Nat King Cole, the 1812 Overture. My father performed Porgy and Bess in the South in a theater down there. Just as part of a program, my father could sing.

MN: So, your father could sing? Did he sing in church?

RC: Yes. My father was part of the church choir. So the music was very, very diverse.

And, *like I said*, that made us different because we didn't just listen to rock and roll, and to this day, I thank my father.

MN: Now did you play musical instruments?

RC: Myself, no. I just could not grasp - -I tried playing trombone. I played trombone in junior high school for two years and that was the extent of it.

MN: Right. Now, what was your major sort of extracurricular? Was it sports? Were you drawn to sports?

RC: Absolutely. Sports was my life. I was back at - - there was the Gramercy Boys Club down there and I have to say - -I give them a lot of credit for giving me some guidance down there. We would run down to the boys' club every day - -

MN: What street was that on?

RC: 143rd between Willis and I think the next avenue, Brook, I think it was Willis and Brook.

MN: Yes, is that still there by the way?

RC: No, no. The boys' club was torn down when the 3rd Avenue L was torn down and they relocated to the Grand Concourse. I think they're up around 180th Street.

MN: So that was an important - -

RC: Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely. Cause we got a lot of guidance there. There were athletic events. I was boys' club of the year, boy, one time down - -I was top athlete and then - -

MN: What was your favorite sport?

RC: It had to be basketball. I played basketball till I dropped - -I was called the NBA star because I would play in the morning, afternoon, and when it got dark at night. I loved basketball and football. We were all diverse so whatever was seasonal at the time, we participated in. I roller skated, matter of fact I won a couple of roller skating speed skating events because the department of parks back then was phenomenal. Mr. McGee and Ms. White, they were the head parkees at the time.

MN: The parkees in which particular - -

RC: PS 18 playground.

MN: Okay, so they had park supervisors assigned to playgrounds. I think we need to talk about that because it's something we don't have any more in New York City and how important that was.

RC: You know, you had an adult individual to look up to. There was trust to a degree. Mr. McGee, again, another individual I think impacted my life. He loved me. I was *Daily Mirror* boy of the year one time because of Mr. McGee.

MN: Do you have any pictures - - any copies of your award?

RC: I might have a picture of me with my Daily Mirror shirt on [laughter], Boy of the Year. But the playground was also again an opportunity to rid yourself of *all the* wild energy. And

we had to turn in a wallet or a watch or something to get, you know, basketballs. *So we had the opportunity to play basketball.*

JP: There were a lot of games.

RC: There was a tremendous amount of games there. And then there was, *then, always--*

MN: So it was Mr. McGee and Ms. White. And did they clean or they would mostly do the recreation?

RC: They were recreation directors. Howard, I remember his name being Howard, was the gentleman that did the cleaning.

MN: So you had a cleaning staff and a recreation staff at this little park and then you also had the PS 18 night center and afternoon center. Did you go to those to those after school programs?

RC: Absolutely. That's where you migrated in the winter. You know once it started getting dark at 4:30, 5 o'clock, you went in there Mr. Bonamere was there [crosstalk]

MN: The jazz pianist.

RC: Oh God, he was something else. He would slap you upside your head in a minute. He walked around with a *golf* stick.

MN: Really?

RC: Yes. He would pop you on your butt. Again we were allowed to play basketball in there, the nok hockey. I loved playing pool, that tennis - -

JP: Ping pong?

RC: Ping pong, yes. So there was a diversity of things- - .

MN: Now what activities did the girls do at these centers?

RC: Jump rope, occasionally a little volleyball, dodgeball. The girls did a lot of arts & crafts.

MN: They had arts & crafts in the - -

RC: Always. And that was - - again - - so you know what, you had an opportunity to develop some skills cause we were, you know, if you wanted to do arts & crafts at a particular time, then you could go and do your arts & crafts. If you wanted to play basketball, you know you went to the gym, *you got on line, and* you said "I'm next," and you got your team together.

MN: Right, so you had, it seems like 5 or 6 different places where you went for supervised activity. It was the Gramercy Boys Club, the Patterson Community Center, the PS 18 park, PS 18 Afternoon and Night Center, and the Congregational Church.

RC: And Gramercy Boys Club.

MN: And Gramercy Boys Club. Did I leave anything out?

RC: [sigh] I'm trying to think [laughter]. Or did I cover all the bases. Well we used to go - - and from there we would go down to Mullally Park next to Yankee Stadium.

MN: And they also had parkees and organized sports there.

JP: And St. Mary's.

RC: Oh, and St. Mary's park and St. Mary's pool. That was a big *one* - -

MN: Now, people told me that it wasn't always that easy for people from Patterson to go down there?

RC: There were gangs over there. Hispanic gangs. The Suicides were over there - - so when you went there you picked a time and you picked a route. And you ran like hell to get to St. Mary's Center, and once you got in there it was a safe haven, and then you picked a time and a place you were leaving and then you ran like hell back home. So, but it was great over there also. Organized sports.

MN: Right, now, were there - - were you aware of any other places where you sort of had to run out of occasionally?

RC: The Melrose Projects [laughter]. It was always something going on. It was animosity for some reason or another between the Melrose and Patterson. And then the Lincoln Projects.

MN: Which were in Harlem?

RC: Right. Across the bridge. So--but there were times that we all got together and participated in sports and then there were other times - - usually the heated areas, the heated times were during the summer. There was always something about the summer time and such. So we stayed out of their area, they stayed out of our area.

MN: Now what about the little Italian neighborhoods?

RC: Oh God. That was fantastic. That was on Courtlandt Avenue. There was Red Hots. We used to go over there and get all of our candies. There was St. Rita's Church and St. Rita's

school across diagonally across from PS 18. During the 4th of July. That's the Italians and the fireworks. And we didn't have to go into Manhattan to see fireworks because they would set up the 50 gallon drums on the street and they would just cut loose over there. For an hour, fireworks. And the police never came into the area. And then we always had the street carnival on Morris Avenue and that started at 149th Street and went up to Melrose, and that was another peaceful time. We would go up to the carnival. So we experienced the Italian culture - -

MN: Now Vicki talked about Frank or Joey's Sandwich shop?

RC: Oh! Joey's - - Joey's Hero Shop, Pat's Hero Shop. The most devastating time for us was when they tore down Joey's and put up the Lincoln Hospital followed that. I used to go everyday there and get a sandwich for my dad for \$0.50, a combination hero, and I still go back once or twice a year into the neighborhood. There's still a couple of places where you can get an Italian *hero* [crosstalk]. You go into the neighborhood now and it's really changed and *put* the additional housing across the street. The diehard Italians are still down there. The high school there used to be Bronx - -

JP: Oh, oh, Bronx Vocation.

RC: Bronx Vocation, that was it!

MN: Where was that located?

RC: 150th Street between Morris and Courtlandt. And then they changed the name of it --the Bronx Automotive, and then it was Gomp--Samuel Gompers.

MN: It seems like - - this is a really great childhood experience you're having. A lot of people have sort of accused us of romanticizing these years. Are there some things on the

negative side that were going on in Patterson in the 50's, looking back on that, you know, that made life difficult or scary or troubling?

RC: You know if I had to live it over again, I don't think I would think twice about living there under those circumstances, under those conditions. Again, it was very family-oriented. Yes, you had the gang fights, you had the south side of the projects, once a year, they would fight against the North side. But, you know, nobody ever got beat up badly, you got beat up. But we played ringolivio, Hot Beans and Butter, all those games so - - And it was always competition between the two sides of the projects.

MN: Right, our side against their side. The other side.

RC: The other side. Who had the best basketball team? We ran track. We created our own track meets.

MN: And it sounds like an amazing number of great athletes came out of this environment.

RC: Yes, yes, and I think had we gotten the exposure that *athletes got* - - or are receiving now that probably 25% of the kids coming out of Patterson would have made professional sports, even basketball. I mean we had *competitions* to see how far we could kick a football. I kicked a football you know, 50 yards with no problem. We'd roof spaldeens that was a big thing to hit the ball, basketball. All of us could dunk. Kareem Abdul-Jabar used to come. All the pros used to come down and work with us in terms of basketball. That was the place to come.

MN: And that was mainly the P.S. 18?

RC: No. That was in the parking lot because they ran tournaments in the parking lot.

JP: Floyd Lane

RC: Floyd Lane, exactly.

MN: So Kareem used to come down there?

RC: To play ball with us. He was just one of the guys, you know, to play ball. And remember I didn't go into the elevator up to our floor to Ray's house, *and he had to duck to get into the elevator. But he (Kareem) was a down-to-earth guy.* On the courts, I remember one of the guys, Ernie. Ernie was one of the guys who was about 3 years older than us-did something to him and pissed him off and Lou just went off and he was just throwing everything down, throwing everything all over the place, but. It was a - -I mean the experience other than I - -I think educationally, a lot more stress should have been applied to education.

MN: So you think that the families didn't emphasize education quite enough or was it the schools weren't innovative enough in trying to motivate kids?

RC: You know there's controversy on that. As I was *talking* with my sister Claudette about that and I felt that education wise at PS 18, and at Clark, and at Dewitt Clinton HS, the teachers there gave us 100%. And I never felt that there was any doubt that that teacher was there to teach and give us what they could give us. I think part of it was my mother had not finished high school at that point - - she did go on and get her high school equivalency and took a little college. But I think - - she being an orphan, daddy working - - my father had cancer and eventually died of cancer at 61 - -I don't think she knew how to teach us how to

study. So I'd have to put the blame on the individual homes than I would on the school system itself, really.

MN: Did you ever experience or observe racism in the schools?

RC: No.

MN: Not from the teachers or towards the kids.

RC: No. No.

MN: The fact that there were predominately white teachers and predominately black kids didn't seem to create a bad dynamic in your experience?

RC: Either that or I was oblivious to it. Or maybe I just didn't experience it. But I have to say overall definitely not. I never heard a teacher make a racial remark. I never saw a teacher show more kindness or love to one student versus other - - If you were academically, what's the right word to use - -I think if you were in one of the academically advanced courses you got 100% from that teacher.

MN: Now did you have - - one of the things we've been asking in this project is - - what about the kids in 4-9, 4-8? Because what - - what about those kids? What was going on there?

RC: I think more than anything those kids had discipline problems. I think they still had teachers that cared. We had the CRMD program and those kids would run through the hallways, I recall. Especially in junior high school - -the male - - most of the CRMD classrooms were taught by males. And they grabbed those kids and bring them into class and I believe that the teachers did the best they could do at the time under the circumstances with

these kids and even these kids that academically were struggling, I believe - -cause I went through that. In the beginning I was in - -when I first entered in school I was in 2-6 and third grade was 3-5, and eventually I worked my way into advanced courses. I never felt cheated, I really, really didn't. I don't know if I'm naive or whatever. And look at some of the kids that came out of the projects: Letty Aponte is a doctor and she's - - two nuclear medicine degrees in medicine. Daniel Georges I know went off to Africa to teach and he's doing phenomenally well. Some of the fellows are teaching art, I mean - - definitely, definitely - - the Jones' boys—one is a professor out in Pittsburgh and another brother is a principal, I think, down at a school at I think in North Carolina. So it's a family I think.

MN: Now what was Clark Junior High like? Was that a positive experience for you?

RC: Yes, it was scary in the beginning, transitioning from grammar school into junior high school. Clark, initially was an all male junior high school when I was in the old building. So I was one of the first classes that arrived that was a coed class. So the older guys, they were a little rough. You had to get initiated to come into the school. They'd beat you up. I always ran, I could run, I guess it was cross country but I'd have to - -sometimes to get home I'd have to run to 149th Street and 3rd Avenue. Run across to Morris Avenue and come around, cause these guys - -

JP: Where was this? The original?

RC: Clark? It was about 3 blocks north and about 2 blocks east of the original. So it was more towards Brook Avenue and maybe 147th Street, 148th Street.

JP: Okay, I know the building.

MN: So after you got over the initiation, was your experience a pretty positive one there?

RC: Yes.

MN: Or was it always a little bit - -

RC: All of a sudden, there was a little more interest in girls and we had to go from classroom to classroom so that was a new experience for me and the teachers they expected a lot more from you. In grammar school they sort of babied you through. Once you got in there - - we definitely, the composition of the school changed. There was a lot more Hispanics, okay, in the school and I'd say it was a good experience. It wasn't a great experience, but it was a good experience to be in the school. I remember Robert Stern, that was his first year. He was my homeroom teacher. He taught Music History and he taught Math. I always got demerits again running my mouth. That was my thing. I always liked to help and I think, you know, I'd go "Ooh, ooh, ooh!" I was one of the "Ooh, ooh, ooh!" guys in class and I always got myself in trouble with the teacher because I couldn't control it.

MN: Now were you a comedian also?

RC: No.

MN: That wasn't your MO.

RC: No, not at all. I was a semi serious guy. I liked people to like me.

MN: Now, kids - - if somebody did well in school, was there any negative - - you know, would kids make fun of kids who did well in school?

RC: Francis Braino. Okay, I never made fun of him, I admired him and then Daniel Georges, Ray - - you've interviewed Ray. Ray was always phenomenal student. Again, we

were in the academic courses, the academic program, so we were always competing against each other, so no. I'd have to say *in general* you were accepted. Now, there were other individuals that didn't accept you and they could make life a little difficult for you but that was either at lunch time, at recess, something like that.

MN: So what was the sort of--I know every school had their tough kids. And this school had some serious tough kids?

RC: That's when I really started to run into tough kids in junior high school. They wanted to take my money away from me. Again, I used to go out and get my dad's lunch and they'd try to take my money from me.

MN: Did they dress differently from the other kids? Was there an outfit for the - -?

RC: They were always in the current style. So, you know, the continental pants, I forgot what they call the suits that change colors.

MN: Iridescent.

RC: Oh yes, yes. And I was always a very conservative kid, you know. I wore Bucks, and loafers to school but that was by choice believe it or not and cuffed pants. It wasn't my family and actually toward the 9th grade I migrated - -

MN: Now in Brooklyn, they use the term jitterbugs. Was that a Bronx thing? Was that a part of the terminology up there?

RC: Yes, definitely there was some jitterbugs up there, some hoods, it was, like I said the dynamite, and the, oh man, there was some guys in there that you just didn't mess with and

just respected them and you stayed away from them. I stayed away from the rough crowd. It was the athletes, I was part of the athletic group and then it was the hoods or the guys that would take you off or whatever.

MN: And the hoods respected the athletes, kind of?

RC: Yes! Because we brought a certain reputation to the projects. They wanted to play ball. If there was some people that wanted to compete against us, "Get Carson, get Hodge, my nickname was Gus I don't know where that came from [laughter], and Lurch, those were my two. [laughter] I was the tall guy, I was the guy that got the boys. So there definitely was a difference between the athletes and there was the lovers, the James Brown and those guys that - - they were the lovers and they always had the girls and everything. And we weren't interested - - we just played ball.

MN: So there were love - - so if you divide the junior high school, you have the athletes, the lovers, the hoods. Was there anybody else? Was there anything like nerds? Or not quite.

RC: Yes of course there were. There are always nerds in the school. Those were the guys who just couldn't do anything athletic but you know what, we cheered them on when it came time to the spelling bees and our science program.

MN: Did kids - - were those kids taken off for their money with regularity?

RC: No. Everybody sort of watched out for each another. I hated fighting but I wasn't going to let one of my friends get beat up. The alternative was to fight or run and most of the time it was like, "Flee!" [laughter] And once we got established in junior high school, there were five or six of us that went to school every morning. We'd call on each other.

MN: Who was your group that you went to junior high with?

RC: Well Jerry Merit, Ray Hodge, Carlos **Puller**, Billy Boy, Ronald McFee, Junior Gilliam -
- well Junior was part of the hoods actually and Willis Steptoe.

MN: Now, looking back did the hoods end up having a more difficult life than the people in
your - -

RC: They're either dead or in jail. Or some of the people are still standing out on the corner,
you know, hanging out--

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

RC: Bucky turned his life around. He became an accountant. And a few of the other guys.
Dynamite disappeared. We don't know what happened to him and one of the other guys - -
well Dynamite was one of the guys that was more - -

MN: What happened to the lovers? Did they move in - -

RC: Again, another circle. Most of the lovers and the hoods - - that was one entity. And,
again, those are the guys, sorry to say that you know, they're dead or in jail or have
accomplished nothing with their lives.

MN: Now when you were in junior high - - were you aware you were on a college track? Was
that something that, you know - - were your older sisters, you know, college bound? Was this
something that you were aware of at that time or did that come later?

RC: That came later. My dad died when I was --just finishing the eighth grade. And I sort of
lost focus at that point. A lot of things, I don't remember. The ninth grade, other than Mr.

Demaser, God rest his soul, he pulled me through. Other than that I was devastated because my father's death came suddenly. Even though he had cancer - - my mother never made us aware that he had leukemia and he died in three days. He got sick and he died and it really tore me apart.

JP: Do you remember being encouraged to take the science high school test? Or being --

RC: Yes. Those core - -I wanted to go to Aviation and I remember Louis Villa, Esteban Figueroa, and Peter DeSilva got selected to those schools, to that particular school. And Francis Braille went to the high school of science and I was really pissed that I didn't get to go to Aviation High School. I could run circles around those guys, especially technically. And all of them, Louis became a used car salesman, Peter taught art, and Figueroa did nothing with his life and I really felt cheated but they were only selecting a certain amount of kids from certain schools.

MN: Now, did they have shop in Clark Junior High?

RC: Yes. We had an electric shop, a woodworking shop, and a book binding - -

MN: Now did any of those things give you real training? Did you get a chance to show your stuff in those places or was it pretty much pro-form.

RC: Oh, I loved it. I loved using my hands so I have to say each one of those courses were applicable to my life. Knowledge is a wonderful thing and I was more technical than academic and so I felt that the electronics - -I was always fixing things at home. Remember the old tube TV's -- It was me and I'd pull the first transistor radio apart at home to see if something was wrong with it. So there was a lack of fear when it came to electricity. The

wood work, using my hands, building things - - later on in life, different things around my home and everything, it was applicable. And, I always took on jobs during the summer, so one of them was working at the local gas station, the Esso gas station, so again working there, again using my hands and making a little money. So it was applicable, I'd have to say.

MN: Now did you start going to parties in junior high with girls or that was later?

RC: I had four sisters, my mother and my grandmother at home. So the last thing I wanted to do was be around a female [laughter]. And the girls loved me to death and I was afraid of them. I couldn't dance, like, you know, they always made fun of you if you couldn't dance. I just didn't feel like - - and everybody was grinding at the time. You know there was the dark lights - - and the movie music like Wind and those slow songs and I just couldn't get myself into a corner with a girl and grind up *on* her. That wasn't me; I'd rather go outside and play basketball. Parties were going on upstairs.

MN: So they were having grinding up parties in 7th, 8th, 9th grade?

RC: 8th and 9th with the blue or red light bulbs.

MN: The blue or red - -

RC: Red light bulbs.

MN: Okay explain to me the blue or red light bulbs.

RC: You had to have a light. Your parents wouldn't allow you to have a party so you had to have a light in the room. So those were the darkest lights you could get. So you put a red one or a blue one in so no one could see what was going on.

MN: Now Marilyn Russell and Pat Payne told me that even in junior high, some girls were getting pregnant. Was that something you were aware of?

RC: No. It was well hidden. You know, in terms of sexual--again, the hood guys--those were the guys that were probably more aware of it than the fellows that were involved in sports and doing things like that. The first time I probably realized something was going on was in high school when I was visiting one of my buddies, my best friend. I don't want to say who it was. Man, he spent a lot of time in the back while I was watching TV in the front, myself and James. So it was like, what the hell is going on back here. But I was naive, okay. I was very naive.

MN: Now, you went, ended up going to Clinton?

RC: Yes.

MN: And what was that experience like?

RC: 8,000 guys. Triple session. A lot of athletics going on in the school and it was a new experience for me. Did I enjoy it? Yes, new environment. Here I was in a school in a predominately Jewish neighborhood and we used to go get bagels every day. It was clean, it was different, it was nice, it was a disciplined school. I remember, you didn't walk into class late, you didn't walk into school late. If you did get to the school late, they took your coat away from you, they took something. And you had to stay after school. You weren't allowed to wear dungarees in school but chino pants were big back then. So chinos and Converse, and a white shirt or colored shirt. And we always had to have collars on the shirt that I recall -- maybe later on -- But we always took pride in ourselves. There was a group that we took pride in. I cleaned my sneakers once a week and scrubbed them down, hang them out the

window, okay that was our dryer other than going to the local laundry mat, we'd hang things out the window. I remember one time I hung a pair of jeans out; it was winter, well they came and they were frozen stiff, cause we used to put these drying racks, these metal things inside the pants to make them look neat and everything. Clinton was a good experience.

JP: Coming away from Clinton. How did you travel to Clinton?

RC: Initially by train. We got the pass but you had to pay one way and I remember myself and I think it was Arnold Melrose. We decided - -we got on at 138th Street and Grand Concourse - - well every day we would jump the train turnstile and one day it was a couple of police officers out of uniform there and they grabbed us and took our passes away. After that either we walked - -

MN: You walked from Patterson to Clinton?

RC: Sometimes we - - yes, yes. We didn't have money to get on that bus, so we didn't have our bus pass.

JP: Clinton was all boys and you had to pass Walton on the way.

MN: Now that was something. I heard a term called the "booty train?"

RC: The "booty train." Yes. That was 3 o'clock and I got out at 1 and I was not going to wait around. Most of the guys - - we were involved in sports. We didn't wait around for the booty train. Those were the guys - - the Dynamites, and so on, they would hang around and wait for the booty train. It was the old trains and a couple of rapes took place on the trains. One, if you unscrew one bulb the whole car would get knocked out, so they would knock out a couple of cars. Eventually the police would not allow the train to stop at the station.

MN: Now were you on any teams at Clinton?

RC: I ran track and a lot of intramural teams. That's when I found out it was very political in terms of sports. Tiny made the team and Tiny actually didn't start on the team that we, **Reddy** and myself, and a few other guys were on outside from the nobles. That was run by the department of parks - - Abe Raskin out of Mullally Park

MN: Right, so you were on the team, the Nobles, out of Mullally Park? And Bubba told me that getting on the Clinton basketball team was incredibly political and incredibly difficult.

RC: Yes. And most of the guys, my team, actually Bubba, myself, Tiny, and Ray and **Bernard Olby**. We had a monster team, we beat high school teams. But again the politics in terms of getting on a sports team - - it was very discouraging. It really really was and that's the way it was. We played with the Nobles and - -

MN: Now did you play indoors there or outdoors - - mostly outdoors?

RC: Oh both.

MN: The Nobles - - did you travel around?

RC: It was a traveling team. Yes that was a great experience for us because Abe Raskin took us out to Queens and as a Bronx kid going out to Queens and we'd go into Manhattan to play. Of course we played all around the Bronx. It was the Dept. of Parks basketball tournament before CBS took it over and as such. So we traveled. We were a traveling team. We always - - every year we won the city championship and it was a great experience. It really was.

MN: Now, when did you start becoming oriented to going to college?

RC: When I graduated from high school my mother said, "You know son, you're not going to sit around and you got to do something." So what happened is initially I went to Lehigh Technical School and I studied mechanical design.

MN: Now where was that located?

RC: In the Bronx, believe it or not, 149th Street and Grand Concourse. It was a trade school there across the street from - - and I finished up a two year program there and then I went on from there to Queensborough Community College and I did a two year program at Queensborough. And I tried Accounting at Hunter and that was not my forte at all and after Hunter came - -I went to various schools. I went to Lehman. I got into some of the adult education courses and then I went on to - - which was Biblical Life Seminary. I did seminary work and now I'm doing graduate work at Nyack. Again, it's seminary work.

MN: So, you - - when did you - - are you an ordained minister now?

RC: No. Not at all. That's not my goal, okay. I like to do pastoral counseling so from that perspective - -

MN: Now pastoral counseling is - - how - - is that something you do from a church or contacts out of your home, in a school?

RC: Basically, it would be out of the church itself. We work with groups in various churches and such. You can actually do counseling on your own. Christian counseling organizations, you can go out and work with them. And if you do work with a non-Christian group, you just have to use your common sense and not use a lot of theological terminology in terms of that.

MN: Now, when did your family leave Patterson? What year?

RC: I believe it was around 1966. '66, '67.

MN: Now at that time, you had graduated from high school?

RC: Correct.

MN: Now what was the motivation for the family to leave? Were things changing there visibly in ways that made it uncomfortable?

RC: Well the neighborhood was starting to get a little rough, but that - - my father dying, more than anything. My mother wanted a change of scenery. Opportunities opened up where we moved over on Astoria Avenue. That was just being developed over there. Lafayette Houses. We lived in the Evergreen Gardens over there.

MN: Now is that - - what they call Mitchell Llama?

RC: Well Lafayette Houses, Mitchell Llama. Evergreen Gardens was just privately owned but it was like going to heaven, [laughs]. We had a terrace, we had two bathrooms. Again, a different ethnic group, it was a multi cultural group there. A lot of Jewish families and Anglo families resided there.

JP: More middle class?

RC: And middle class, exactly. Mom had gone on and finished school and she eventually got a job with the Port Authority and she was doing much, much better, you know, economically and she just saw a need for change for us. Moving out of the projects, I think it was just part of the transition - -

MN: It was part of the transition. It was a weigh-station for families on the way up?

RC: Yes. I definitely have to say that because even before dad died we were looking for homes in the North Bronx. The Valley area, Gun Hill Road area - -

MN: Right. Because certainly, that's where Nathan's family moved, to the Valley.

RC: Right, a lot of the families from the Patterson - - the Jones' and the such, they moved up in that *general vicinity*- -

MN: Now by the time you left, did you feel it was a very different place than the one you moved in to? Was maintenance down and things like that?

RC: Yes, you know, and don't take this the wrong way but they weren't screening the families like they used to screen the families. We were well screened. They came to our home and checked how we lived, how clean we were. The economic status of the family at that time and all of a sudden there were families moving in, instead of using the incinerator, they would leave the garbage in front of the incinerator. They were peeing in the elevator and they - - the grass. You know, they were abusing the projects so there was definitely a change. Welfare families - -I - - even though I think welfare families did live there, it was very low key and it became more pronounced. You would see the way people carried themselves. Again, I would have to say initially when we moved in there, it was low income, but there was a lot of pride and again, the projects were built for soldiers coming out of World War II. Middle class - - it was almost like a middle class black or upper, lower middle class. It was certainly a different environment. The environment started to change. It was a little more violence there - - they were starting to knock walls down between apartments so you

had the bigger families - - the Gordon's the Rice's living in these apartments that were made larger, six bedrooms instead of three bedrooms, type of things. So the environment was changing. I wasn't as aware of it because I didn't socialize there anymore. I was starting to - - my social life had moved on and so the Patterson was not conducive to what I needed to do with my life.

MN: Did you - - did you - - it seems like you kept friends from that period.

RC: Oh yes, yes. There was definitely the people that impacted my life and I wanted to stay friends with them. I still, matter of fact, just last week Geraldine Suarez and Mildred Aponte, we - - fifty years and we had lunch together down in Manhattan. So there are a few people. Ray and I, Ray was my first friend in the projects and I don't know what happened to him. All of a sudden, two years ago, three years ago, he just died out and I called him, I call him for his birthday every year - -

MN: Yes, he came down for an interview.

RC: Yes, I understand that. I was really glad to hear that. Bubba shared that information with me so maybe he's coming out of his hiatus. I can't understand what transpired but there are a few people that I still stay in contact. When I go down to the Patterson for the reunion, most of the people, I'll be honest, I didn't recognize and we're talking 30, 40 years. They looked at me in a different light. They were proud of me, what I had accomplished in my life. They always said, "Carson, we knew you were going to be a success with your life." And I'm going, success? I mean I've done okay but it's all relevant and for some people I was the president of Verizon. [laughter] It's how you carry yourself and I share with people. I remember one kid I called on the phone - -I called cause I still reach out to the community

and he said, "Hey mom! There's a white man on the phone." [laughter] And I laughed and I said, gee, because you speak in such a way and such a fashion - -

JP: You have a Bronx ism - - Your speech pattern is like people who lived in the Bronx, who lived close to the Concourse. It's a definite Bronx. You could go anywhere in this country and people who would know would say, "The Bronx."

MN: The Bronx. It's an accent.

RC: Just like people from Brooklyn [crosstalk]. The Brooklyn dialogue. I have to say that my experience down there was one I'll never regret other than academically.

MN: Are there any things that you didn't get a chance to say that you'd like to say?

RC: I mean, you've asked me an awful lot. [laughter] You know my family, I raised my daughters up in the Pleasantville/*Thornwood* area and I wish that they had had the opportunity to experience some of the culture of living in the city in an urban setting. I think they've been deprived. When I used to bring them down, they would roll up the windows on the car, lock the doors and they didn't understand what it was all about. And culturally they are really limited, so I think every - - anybody that has *not* grown up in the city, not just necessarily in the projects, has lost out on a lot. Because you could have grown up on a city lot, whether it was Tinton Avenue or Forest Avenue or one of those other avenues - -there was a unity that existed. I see more prejudice now, maybe it's more pronounced, more prominent than I did back then. But again, there were social clusters alright. So Cypress Avenue was Irish, Brook Avenue was Irish. My father - - most of the time that's where he was stationed down there. You had Morris Avenue, which was Italian.

MN: Now was that Irish neighborhood like dangerous to go in to?

RC: No. Not at all. But again, each neighborhood there were certain times you could go into certain neighborhoods and certain times you couldn't go into those neighborhoods.

MN: right, now, were you ever subject to ridicule or anger for being light skinned?

RC: Yes. Actually none of the black girls in the projects would go out with me. They just - - and they called me 'Injun' growing up. And I just accepted that. I mean, to me it was no big deal and if you saw my sisters, they looked more Native American than I do. I look more Anglo, but that barrier came down through my athletic abilities but other than that, you know, I definitely experienced the remarks and that's the way it was. It was no big deal. I mean, do I regret it? I was naive, what can I say. And my parents, I mean, dad and mom, we were always doing something anyway - - my mother - -I mean, if there was a place to go and it was free in New York, we went.

MN: Did you go to museums?

RC: We were always taken to museums. Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building, Staten Island Ferry if nothing else just for a ride - -

MN: Now this was as a family? The family went together.

RC: And then I took that experience - - you know I always tell my mom, God bless her for that. And she says well I could've done better - - of course you could - - everybody could do better, they always want to do better but overall our exposure, when I talk to other kids like the Billy Lloyds that have never left - - they have never left the Bronx. So we were always off the block. My father worked for the Transit Authority. "Here comes the Carson kids." So

we were allowed on the trains and the buses for free - - and my mother - - they gave my mother a special pass. So we always had that experience, so we were - -I got tired of museums because the school took you to museums and your mom took you to museums. Of course, going with my mom, there was always lunch, there was always -- So yes, we got a lot of exposure that a lot of kids just didn't have the opportunity to have.

MN: Right. And did all of your sisters go to college?

RC: And finish? Two of my sisters finished. My oldest sister Sandra teaches art out in Indiana, my sister Etelle works at the FAA in Washington D.C., Claudette's with American Airlines - - she went to a two year junior college, and my youngest sister, who we babied, in and out of school - - she's back in college now - - she's attending Lehman College. So we try to motivate each other also, we try to support each other in terms of that. Again, just talking about my experience in the Bronx - -I have no regrets - -

MN: Now, did having all these experiences make you more desirous of being a counselor?

RC: Absolutely.

MN: Because, I mean, choosing this, you know, you're trying to help people deal with things in their lives. Did your background - - how did that background help you in this path?

RC: You know what? I saw what was done with me from Congregational church to my school teachers to the after school center and I see that the kids now don't have the opportunities. And I remember when I graduated high school, going to 149th Street, and I don't know if it was the whole UAC program or whatever, but they grabbed a hold of me and

said, "Look, you're a smart kid. You've got a lot going for you." And they got me a job, they made me shave. I mean, I had peach fuzz but somebody took - -I was important. And just like Reverend Hardy and Reverend - - all of them, they showed concern and you know what, I want to give back. And so I just retired from Verizon after 32 years and now I have an opportunity to give back to the community and kids love it.

MN: Now you can be - - as a pastoral counselor - - you can be a mentor to kids?

RC: Yes, and I do that now. I do mentoring programs. I go back to the South Bronx - -I actually go to a church on Fridays and I work in a soup kitchen.

MN: Really? Oh wow.

RC: Yes. I do a lot of volunteer work.

MN: In the Bronx?

RC: Yes, in the Bronx. I go back to the junior high, Clark, and I was the keynote speaker at Clark Junior High School. They were ecstatic!

MN: Wow!

RC: And you know what's really really great? That I tell them that I came from the Patterson Projects because people don't - - they don't see me in that light. So when I go back and I let them know - - any kid - - whether it's over on the Grand Concourse, I let them know that I came from that environment and let's work at it. And they go, "You mother—" and I let them know, I say, when I lectured. Every year I would go back to Clark Junior High School and I would - - career day - - and I would lecture for career day. And I loved it - - I'm sorry they stopped it. But I would go back there and I would share information with these

kids and give them hope. Not just college hope but technical hope. I'd tell them, open a bodega, be a mechanic, but be the best you can be, and because not everybody's cut out - - And I let some of them know, I said, you know, some of you girls are going to get pregnant. Some of you guys are going to die, some of you girls are going to die. Some of you people are going to get AIDS, but you know, I'm a realist - -I let them know, this - - you can take this path or you can take this path. You - - but I want to give them the opportunity. I want to open the door for them and show them there are choices and not everybody's going to make \$100,000.00 a year - -I mean I had my knee cap removed from my leg from my right leg, I was an athlete. I expected to play professional basketball and it didn't happen and so I neglected my grades and I tell them - -I pull up my pants in a minute and I'll show them my right leg and I'll show them - - this can happen to you so stay with your academics, stay with a program, focus. Just don't focus on that one thing there and you give them examples of people and Tiny Archibald is a perfect example, making \$600,000.00 a year but no one was there to mentor Tiny to this day. I mean, I remember Tiny coming to me after his career was over, saying, "Carson, can you help me get a job?" This is Tiny Archibald. You know what I'm saying? So it's unfortunate, so I let kids know that I knew Tiny, I let them I know this and I share this information with them in a positive light.

JP: They don't know who Tiny Archibald is do they?

RC: Well a lot of them don't but you'd be amazed that a lot of them do.

MN: Because they watch the NBA. The 50 top players and all that.

RC: The highlights. And let's see, I belong to a Native American organization within Verizon. I was one of the officers with them. Boys and Girls Club of America. I lectured for the Board of Education on numerous occasions out in Brooklyn. I go out and I speak there on

Native American history. I go back to the Bronx now, I run a program - -I work with a program called Hearts and Hammers, it used to be Christmas in April. We go to senior citizens home once a year, we clean it, we repair it, whatever is necessary. I've been with that program numerous years. I ran a basketball program at the church. I've worked with the police department. I mean - -I just love going back to the community.

MN: Wow. [crosstalk] This is just, I you know - - it was a great interview, it's nice to have an uplifting interview. I mean, but you know - -

JP: You know, when the first interviews were going on - - one of the students wrote a paper about Morrisania.

MN: You got that? Mark Smith sent it out and then everybody said he romanticized - - [crosstalk] - - responding - -

JP: Yes, to romanticizing it and see I didn't have - - See he quoted me quite a bit and he got - - he kind of got of view of my experience growing up in the Bronx, which is very similar to yours - - a very positive, uplifting kind of a thing. I don't remember a lot of negative things growing up, even though we didn't live in the projects, we lived on a street where it was part of a viable community. Where there were places to go and things to do.

[phone rings]

RC: I'm not going to answer this.

JP: You know, when people who lived around the corner from me. Howie Evans, lived around the corner from me, talked about how he skipped school because he was afraid of the

gangs and we went to the same high school. But his experience was completely different from mine. I didn't pay any attention to the gangs because they never bothered me.

RC: I never skipped school because of that because you know what, my father was waiting there, my mom was - -

JP: My father had a razor strap on the back and he said go get it - -

RC: Double-sided [laughs].

JP: And he said, I'm going to take my nap now. I'll talk to you - - we'll go upstairs later."

[laughter]

MN: Yes, well, it's - - to me with this poverty and you know, there's always going to be problems. And some of these - - they were poor people who brought a certain amount of - -

RC: I think poverty and lack of education. Because we were poor. I mean I used to put newspaper in my sneakers, you know. Daddy couldn't always afford to buy sneakers for me or shoes for me and I remember getting second-hand clothes. You know, my cousin, A.J., his father was a minister and they were pretty well off out in Brooklyn and he would bring me some of his second hand clothes but you know what, it was all part of the experience, growing up.

JP: No one looked down on you because you didn't have money. It was by quality of life.

RC: And we definitely had quality of life. My - - that's why I was asking, that's what I'm saying to you. We probably grew up in a similar circle, because my Uncle Freddy watched out for me, my Uncle Richard watched - - we were accountable to the family.

MN: Now did your entire family at that time identify as black? Or did some identify as Indian explicitly in that time?

RC: The - - it was a negative thing to be a Native American so we all identified - - our social circle was Blacks and predominately light skinned, red skinned Blacks, okay, that we socialized. It was just amazing - - and everybody had the same mixture. My family is from North Carolina and Virginia and my mom was born in Ohio but if you look at all the pictures, if you look at everybody, we all were very similar in some aspect or another and the social circle was there.

JP: Why was there negativism towards Indians? Why do you think?

RC: There was, first of all, I really believe, to be an Indian back in the 20's 30's, they owned most of the land. So these people driven off their land, they were driven out West, all right, we had two Trails of Tears and so to give them anything that would acknowledge who they were and what they were and where they lived would feed into the experiences that the Europeans put the *Native Americans* through.

JP: But within your peer group, within the Bronx - -I mean I don't know if I everyone knew anybody who identified as a Native American or an Indian growing up although probably all of us had some strain of - - it was easier to identify as black than - -

RC: Because that's the way it was passed on to us. Okay, that was, my grandmother to my great grandmother and so on - - and so that whole social circle that was just passed on.

MN: If you look at it, you go to a place like the Bronx, there are institutions in - - and there weren't in the other -- at least visible. I mean, but that's a larger question, I mean, we could

probably have a seminar on and maybe actually at some point the project should look at in terms of understanding identifications, you know, in terms of Native American, African American, Caribbean - -

RC: You're part Caribbean?

JP: No, my mother was from South Carolina and *my father was* from Alabama.

RC: The Mound Indians down there and so on.

JP: Yes, my dad was from an area called *Mussel Shoals* [crosstalk] -- and right down the street from his homestead. I was able to go back there in the 40's. There was an Indian mound in the river, in the river *widened at that point - -because of the* Tennessee Dam Project. And the mound was like right in the middle, we could see it from his house.

MN: Yes, well okay.

(END OF SESSION)