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## **Crichlow, Gertrude and Hennessy, Adrienne and Dorsett, Virginia and Boney, Miriam**

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Interviewees: Gertrude Crichlow, Adrienne Hennessy, Virginia Dorsett, Miriam Boney

Interviewer: Unknown

Date: March 3, 2004

Interviewer (I): It is March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2004; I am at St. Augustine's church in the South Bronx, interviewing Gertrude Crichlow about her experiences at St. Augustine's in the Bronx. Good afternoon.

Gertrude Crichlow (GC): Good afternoon.

I: [Laughs] I just want to know a little bit about a couple of things. First, your experience at St. Augustine's and I see you've brought some materials here for us to look at and you've been involved with St. Augustine's quite a long time. And also I would like to know a little bit about your own spiritual journey in the Catholic Church, and how you see it operating in the African American community, as you've experienced it. So you can start wherever you want.

GC: You want to know how I started going to school?

I: Sure.

GC: Well, I lived right across the street from our Lady of Victory. My mother has six children at that time and she decided that I should go to the school across the street because it's right near. She wasn't a Catholic, my father was a Catholic but we didn't practice the religion, so –

I: So your father was a Catholic.

GC: He was a Catholic but he wasn't a practicing one.

I: Where did your father come from?

GC: We came from South Carolina, north – Charleston, South Carolina and I came up here I guess when I was a baby, about two months. And I lived downtown, 115<sup>th</sup> Street on the east side, so he didn't – he lost his job when – the kind of job he had then, he worked in the post office, and we came up here at 171<sup>st</sup> street. So my mother saw the school across the street, so, not too acquainted with school, I was the oldest child, she said that you can go across the street. We didn't know at that time that if you went to Catholic school you have to pay. You kids pay some – but anyway the sisters said ok, so I started the Catholic school and I was only black, the first black to come into the school and, of course I wasn't accepted readily. I mean, there were some kids who would hold my hand and they went through a lot of things at the beginning, but somehow the world always provided somebody who said, I'll hold your hand. And I believe they were Italian, they were Italians because the Irish used to live on Clay Avenue. And to get to Clay Avenue from St. Augustine's you had to go up the stairs, they would all go up the stairs to Clay Avenue. The rest of us would be down in the lower part [laughs]. And those people were the rich people up there. We would live on Webster Avenue or Park Avenue, we were the poor people. Anyway, I did go through the school and my sisters and brothers, they followed through afterwards. I hope they didn't have the same problem I had, I was the first. And –

I: And this was Our Lady of Victory.

GC: Yes.

I: On 171<sup>st</sup> Street?

GC: Yes. How I to be involved in St. Augustine's, when I got married –

I: Now when did you be – were you baptized yet at this point?

GC: Oh, I was baptized a baby.

I: Oh, you were baptized as a baby?

GC: Oh yes, in Charleston I believe. In Charleston yes, because I got the birth certificate, the baptism certificate.

I: Oh, so you were baptized in Charleston.

GC: Yes.

I: South Carolina, ok. Did you – was your father, he was baptized as an infant as well?

GC: I suppose he was baptized, you know, in South Carolina but you know they stayed away from the religion, they don't practice it. Oh wait a minute, now I also remember that he went to St. Benedict, I think, in Manhattan.

I: Yes, the St. Benedict the Moor, that was the black church in the earlier, before --

GC: Ok, I think that he was a Catholic already, because I – considering that I became a Catholic as a baby, it wasn't my mother; it must have been through his influence. Because the two people who are my godparents, they were Catholics. So, I think they practiced religion, then they came up here and started going to the church at St. Benedicts. But I never knew him as a practicing Catholic, three years and my mother was always making us go to church and she wanted to become a Catholic and she didn't become a Catholic until she died, before she died, the priest, you know, gave her – she always wanted to become one. And my father, but I just don't remember him going to church. So, but I graduated from there and I wanted to go Cathedral, that's another thing because my education was all right. I was a good student; there was no reason why I shouldn't go to Cathedral. You know St. Patrick's Cathedral? And the kids were going, well, they did charge us 10 cents a week, they called it elocution, something like that, for going to school, of course we had 10 cents a week, you know. And every time we had to be in a

procession or make – somebody would give me their [inaudible], you had flowers on your head then. And sister would call somebody who's had it too long, put it on my head or something. I had to go through all that, [inaudible] in Our Lady of Victory. But when I left there, I went to Morris. I tried to go to Cathedral; I wanted to go to St. Patrick's Cathedral and I asked the – and I put my name in and I was accepted but I asked – the sisters told me I shouldn't go. And I wondered why I couldn't go. They said no, I don't think you could afford it. Well I didn't take that as the reason, of course, I think because I was black. And at that time Cathedral only had white students.

I: And now this would be around what year?

GC: Oh, 1936.

I: 1936.

GC: Because I graduated – yes, 1936.

I: So you were a freshman in 1936?

GC: Yes, I graduated from Our Lady of Victory. And so next to that, next step was a public school. I think they sent me to Walton and I didn't like it there, got sick so I went to Morris High and Morris – I graduated from Morris High, that's right across, around here, Morris High. And that time was, they were strict as a Catholic school, not that it is today, but it was a good school, and I got through there alright. Now how I got involved with St. Augustine now, I got married in Our Lady of Victory. I got – I was living on 25<sup>th</sup> street, near St. Joseph's parish, then I wanted to move up here, and there was an apartment on 169<sup>th</sup> I think, on Franklin Avenue, my relatives lived there and they were moving out and I got the apartment. They went to Our Lady of Victory, I mean St. Augustine because there was two girls and at that time St. Augustine had

mostly white people, but they didn't graduate because they were like my, they probably left here when they were -- before graduation, you know, maybe when they were teenage with their mother. They were my cousins I think, something like that. So I move into this apartment, in their apartment. One bedroom, I think I had started out with two kids there and wound up with 10 [laughs] and there was one bedroom and we tried to get a larger apartment and with the housing we put two apartments together, and -- they put two apartments together but they [inaudible] --

I: You were saying that?

GC: I was trying to get an apartment. I tried through New York housing to get an apartment. I elected to take an apartment wall down and make it big. And pray to God [inaudible] all over, all the officials in the Church -- in the City, please, a new apartment, got 10 kids and only one bedroom, but I never got one, thank God! You know why? Because if I had ever gotten in a project with seven girls and three boys I think I would've lost them all. I never knew where they were, most of them skipped most of the day. But a neighbor found an apartment, a house. I live in a house, one bedroom, no six -- three bedrooms and that was all right. And all my kids went to St. Augustine's, that's how we got involved there, I'm telling her but you see my voice is going. For a while there, when my [inaudible] weren't there that was involved, like anything that happened in St. Augustine's, you know, meetings with the children, or [inaudible]. When my youngest one went to school, that was Algon, 6 years old, that was ended my freedom at home, if you call it freedom. The sisters got after me and said, Mrs. Crichlow, you no longer have children at home and we need you here. And I started working at St. Augustine substituting as a teacher, and I substituted a number of times and then got involved in so many things after they found that I could handle math, because, you know, with eighth grade, with the new math, and I

know my math from my children because I helped them all at home and naturally I would know what they were doing so I would know. And then they got me, I was a secretary, I was a – I worked on, as – afterschool program, remember afterschool program with Sister Francis. I was there as a bookkeeping secretary. And was that involved in HRA? HRA, I think HRA got the money from [inaudible], right. And I worked with them, and after the program was over they brought me to work at HRA downtown, I refused to. Then the [inaudible] the [inaudible] resources department gave me the grant, about three and a half years grant, Sister Genevieve.

Adrienne Hennessy (AH): Ok, so that's the one with mothers, with the various mothers –

GC: Yes. Yes, mothers programs, she's picking up right here. They were mother's programs.

We had 15 mothers and they were working in a classroom called the workshop way with Brother Ed, Sister Genevieve –

AH: I know Sister Genevieve was –

GC: Right, and also [inaudible] program. They had, that's when Grace Institute started.

Because we worked on Grace, did you know anything about Grace? That's the – we still have it in the rectory.

U: The Sisters of Charity teach the unwed mothers in the community they can come here for a GED or they have computer classes.

AH: Oh, ok. Right in this room here?

GC: Upstairs.

AH: In the rectory, upstairs, yes.

I: In the rectory, ok. I just want to say – but this, can you tell me your full name, I just – because you are speaking on the tape and I want to –

AH: Adrienne Hennessey is my name.

I: Hennessey. And how do you spell Adrienne?

AH: A-D-R-I-E-N-N-E.

I: So Adrienne Hennessy has joined our group here and is helping Gertrude with some of the information. And she's going to be reading some of the material as well. Thank you. Ok, so you were speaking about the Grace institute, when did this start?

GC: That must have been '67. That's when the mother's program started because I worked officially for the church and school as an accountant in 1975. Because the program ended with the sisters, the mother came from Washington D.C. – I can't remember –

AH: Ok, right, the funds dried up around that time. So, the program shut down.

GC: Yes. And while we working with, yes, Sister Genevieve was working with, you know, with Ed and trying to get the pulses and stuff and that's probably around the time Grace started.

I: And that's around the late '60's, early 70's?

GC: Around the '60's I would say.

I: And you were paid for what you were doing?

GC: Oh yes. I started to volunteer. When I started as a substitute teacher, I did it voluntarily, but then after a while they would call on me so much they started giving me a little money here and

there and you know that always helped. You know, not officially but they would give me money and say –

AH: Stipend.

GC: Yes, and then from there in 1975, March 10<sup>th</sup> I think it was I started working as an accountant for the church and the school. I didn't want the job, because I wasn't an accountant but they insisted and here I am still here. Father Jeffers did that. Yes, he had a big influence on my life; he always made me do everything he wanted to do. That's why I'm living in my house over there now because he made me move. But, you know, when you look at the – you want to know the things that's happening --

I: And Father Jeffers.

GC: Robert Jeffers.

I: Robert Jeffers, yes I'm going to interview him.

GC: Oh yes.

I: And he's living at – is he great?

AH: Yes.

GC: He knows everything [laughs].

AH: And then I mean he just has a memory like –

GC: Oh yes he does.

AH: Wonderful, wonderful. He really knew his parishioners. You know, he really did, he had a good relationship with practically all of us, you know. He was a real hands on pastor.

GC: But he was involved in everything. But then we had here, don't forget, we had another program when the sisters were, that was the last year after Tom came in. Tom Pilecki, when Tom Pilecki came in as the principal the sisters left.

AH: You mean St. Augustine School of the Arts or?

GC: Yes.

AH: Yes, yes he did, Tom Pilecki.

GC: And the sisters, they didn't want to work with that program so they left and he was here about three years and he had a beautiful program.

I: St. Augustine's school of the arts?

AH: From the time that he was principal the school became St. Augustine's School of the Arts. He instituted a music and art program into the curriculum of the school which was wonderful. My kids were going to St. Augustine at the time and my daughter, you know, I went to the violin recitals, you know, even though you had to kind of say, what's that they're playing? You know, because, in the beginning, you know, they're just making noise with the instruments but they grew. And my son had trumpet, you know, this was really wonderful for the kids and the community, because, you know, our kids weren't able to afford to go and get lessons, you know, music lessons, and so bringing this into the school program was really fantastic. Tom Pilecki did some things in our community that we should always remember him for, you know. Had our kids putting on shows and plays and, you know, it brought the whole community out in a sense, you know, because the of parents they invited all the relatives and friends and you know, it was quite an opportunity I would say for not only the kids but for all of us because it got our kids to realize, you know, just what they could do. Give them the opportunity, you know.

GC: And remember, when they were given those plays or whatever you call it at the theater on Boston Road –

AH: On Boston Road for a little while, right. They converted this church, what was once a church into a theater. He did this, you know, he had people, entertainers interested in St. Augustine, in fact Bill Cosby was on the board at one time and Cyndi Lauper, you know, people in the entertainment business were on the board of St. Augustine during his tenure and, you know, we were on the map there for a while.

GC: It was great and every time he gave something up in the theater it seemed like we were downtown. I mean it was [inaudible].

[Crosstalk]

GC: [inaudible] were coming to perform, and when they performed it was just like you were downtown. The music! Remember that funny music you was talking about, it turned into beautiful music.

AH: Definitely.

GC: It did.

AH: It did. It turned into a real professional show when they really got the kids going, you know, it was great.

I: How do you spell his name?

GC: Tom Pilecki?

I: P-O

AH: P-I-L-E-C-K-I

I: P-I-L-E-C-K-I. And what were the years that he did this?

AH: He left in '90 –

GC: '92 he left.

I: 1992? Oh, this was very recent.

GC: Oh yes.

[Crosstalk]

AH: It was more than 10 years ago that he left us. He was here from about '80 – Tom was here at least I would say, maybe 7, 8 years.

GC: And probably was – I worked at the school but [inaudible] into the school. My sons were already gone when --

AH: Right, right.

GC: Let me see if I anything about Tom here.

AH: He had been a brother in the religious before –

I: He was a Christian Brother?

[Crosstalk]

I: Which order it was.

GC: I don't know.

AH: I don't remember. If I knew – you know I don't.

GC: He might have been a Christian Brother but there's different Christian Brother's because the one's that would live in the convent, remember?

AH: Yes. And we had Franciscan and Christian Brothers here.

GC: Right, he was – that's what he was a Franciscan.

AH: No, I don't think so.

GC: I really don't know what he was.

AH: Father Jeffers would probably be able to give you a little more into Tom.

I: Yes. Because I know all the priest really have a handle on all the different things.

GC: I used to have my office upstairs and one thing I liked working in the school, I'd be working in my office and I'd hear the children's rehearsing. And sometimes the speakers were on, I'd be listening to their music, it was great. Children can sing very well, you know, and when they sing together and it sounds go great. And when he left and I had to go over into the rectory, I didn't want to go anywhere [laughs].

AH: Another thing we should say about Tom too is, during his time as principal, the school and the church were really connected. By him being principal of the school and by him also being director of the choir it was really a link and so it just seemed like a lot of the school kids back then were Catholic and so it was like a one thing, you know, not separate school and church, you know. So that whatever was going on in the school the church congregation would participate in and vice versa which makes it such a wonderful thing, you know, because it's like a total family type of relationship, you know.

GC: And the directors of music he had.

I: So he directed the choir in the church and he directed the music program.

GC: Yes. Yes, it was beautiful.

AH: And for a time he was principal of the school too. So he kind of had a handle on both sides and it really, it worked marvelously I think for the time that he was here.

GC: And Father Jeffers had a lot to do with it. Because he's the one that –

AH: Yes, they had a very good relationship.

GC: And what else, are we [inaudible].

I: I just wanted to ask you, do you mind telling me what year you were born?

GC: Oh yes I know that. I do remember when I was born. I was born in May 18, 1921.

I: And this was in Charleston, South Carolina.

AH: Oh, I just learned something about you Mrs. I thought you were here forever in New York.

[Laughter]

GC: No, I don't know anything about –

I: You came up when you were a child right?

GC: I was about two months old.

I: Oh, 2 months.

GC: I had a sister before me. I had an older sister and she passed away at a year old and then I came along. I guess for some reason the family, my father and mother decided to come to New York, I don't know –

I: And you first lived in – you came right to the Bronx? No?

GC: I remember my first house was on 115<sup>th</sup> street on the East Side because I remember the house. I even remember –

AH: And do you know what church you went to? I mean, were you still older on that side of town? Because I was baptized in

[Crosstalk]

GC: I didn't go to church, right. And I can only remember, in this house, and my mother had a white girl, a young white girl who used to watch me. That was strange wasn't it? I don't know where she went, I can't remember. I remember when I was maybe about 4, 5 years old; I don't know what age, but I –

AH: And that might not even be strange because, how was the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood at that time, you know?

[Crosstalk]

I: Probably Italian, because that's – 115<sup>th</sup> street is where Our Lady of Mount Carmel is on East Side. That's when they had the Festus, they still have the Festus? They still have a Festus; do you remember anything about that, the Italian Festus?

GC: No we didn't. I told you we didn't go to church, we –

I: No that's in the street. It would have been on 115<sup>th</sup> Street, out in the open.

GC: I was a little girl!

I: Ok, no it's ok.

[Laughter]

AH: Now St. Paul the Apostle is the church I was speaking of, you know, that's in that area also.

GC: 59<sup>th</sup> Street?

AH: No, no. 100-and, no. Not that one down there. Uptown on the East Side somewhere.

I: And that's where you were baptized?

AH: Yes.

GC: You're a New Yorker [laughs].

I: And you were baptized as an infant? Because your family is Catholic going way back or?

AH: My mom yes.

I: Your mom.

AH: Yes.

I: Where was she from?

AH: St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. But she came here as a child also.

GC: Oh, so you were born here.

AH: Yes, born here. Yes. My sister was born over on the East Side, you know, in the area that you spoke of. And she was born in the house, you know, you know, around those times

midwives, you know. But no, the rest of us were born in hospital. My sister was the first of us, you know.

GC: You'll have to find out where they were born.

I: So you were born in this country, I mean in the States?

AH: In Harlem.

I: Oh, in Harlem.

AH: Sidenham Hospital, no longer in existence but, that's what it was called.

I: What was it called?

AH: Sidenham.

I: Sidenham?

AH: Yes. Sidenham, on 24<sup>th</sup> and St. Nicholas Avenue, on that side. I think I's a development for senior citizens now the site where the hospital used to be.

GC: Is it the Lorraine [inaudible] is it the Lorraine?

AH: No the Lorraine's a little further down and a little further over.

GC: That was a hospital I think before it was –

AH: Yes. She – because Sister Lorraine is at the Terrence Cardinal Cook Nursing Home, which is a little further down on Central Park West I think.

I: Did your mom and other folks; were they active in the Catholic Church when they came here?

Or were they going to, participating or –

AH: Well, ok. What I can say about my mom was that for the most part, I was raised by my aunts and other relatives because my mom was not in good health, you know, and so there were times in my childhood that I can remember that she was hospitalized for periods of time and we would be living with one aunt or another aunt. Or sometimes when my father was still living he would have a person, you know, like a lady in the community that took care of children and even for some time I can remember just living with someone outside of the family or – so at times when my mother was ill, so. I can't say that as a child growing up I remember my mother's involvement with the Catholic Church but both my aunt's were Catholic, so one lived on Boston Road very near here so I remember coming here with her as a child. And then my other Aunt that was Lutheran at the times that we lived with her I remember going to her church with her, you know, even though we were baptized Catholics it was – maybe some little times in between. But I attended St. Anthony of Padua school for a couple of years, then we went back to Harlem. We were sort of gypsies, you know, from Harlem to the Bronx and so – we went to Harlem and from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade I was in St. Thomas the Apostle. They just closed that church recently.

I: So you went to St. Thomas the Apostle school?

AH: Yes I did. [Inaudible] the Blessed Sacrament too there when I was 10.

I: And what year was that?

AH: Well that was 143, so I would say in the mid-'50's.

I: Ok, were there a lot of black kids there?

AH: Oh yes. Yes.

I: So you were baptized, I'm sorry, at St. Paul the Apostle.

AH: Yes.

I: But this was on the Upper East Side?

AH: Yes.

I: Alright. And so you – have you been at St. Augustine's as an adult for a while? Did you move –

AH: Since around '63.

I: You had moved up here from Harlem, or?

AH: Moved up from Harlem, still going to school, you know and living with one of my aunts and then when that aunt passed away in the early 60's my two younger sisters and myself were living with that aunt and I was in high school. And after she passed, we were, you know, receiving social security checks on the death of our father and they switched it over from my aunt into my name. I was 17 years old and I was about to graduate from high school and so I became like the caretaker of my two younger sisters officially, you know. At that time I was still, I was living on Union Avenue and we were going to St. Anthony of Padua and I got my first job at the Department of Welfare, and it sounds like you in a sense Mrs. Crichlow, I was looking for a place to live because I needed to get out of the apartment that I was in on Union Avenue, was really kind of devastated in the place that we were living in and when I started working for the Department of Welfare, a person there befriended me and she had room in her apartment and for a year she allowed my two younger sisters to live with her and I lived with her mother. And in the meantime she was like an advocate for me, she helped me compose a letter to the commissioner of the Housing Authority and telling him what my plight was and everything. And he helped me get an apartment in public housing and so my two sisters and I moved into an

apartment on Webster Avenue in 1965 and we lived there until, well I lived in that same apartment until 2001 and I moved a couple of years ago into a private house. My friend in the community, brothers were living in the downstairs part of her house and within the year, they both passed away and so she had this apartment available in her house.

I: What were the names of the projects that you lived in on Webster Ave?

AH: Butler Houses.

I: What were the conditions like, was it good?

AH: Oh, when I moved in, in '65, I was the first person to move into that apartment that I, you know, lived in so it was really quite nice it was like, you know, moving into a brand new place. And at that time, they had the lobby doors locked, they had milk machine in the lobby, they had deliveries from soda company and milkman, you know, so we really had all the conveniences of the area, you know, and it stayed quite nice I can't say for too long really. Because by, I would say – I moved in, in '65 and by mid-70's I was really ready to get out. It was a drastic change in, you know, less than 10 years.

GC: Did [inaudible].

AH: Yes, I know one of your daughters did so that must've been here, yes I think at the Housing Office, yes.

GC: She and she said that she couldn't stand it any longer because it got so bad. That's the bad part of –

AH: Yes. So I understand what Mrs. Crichlow is saying. What could've been a blessing maybe if she could've gotten an apartment because, back in that time, in the time she was looking for a

place and even maybe up until now what housing would do with large families, they would break two apartments up, take the wall down and, you know, enlarge it. I know at least one family that had about 13 kids and that's what they did, you know, not in my development, but in another one in the Bronx.

GC: Davis?

AH: Huh?

GC: The Davis's?

AH: No, not anybody from St. Augustine's, no. The [inaudible], no, this was another family.

I: So what caused it to run down, do you think?

AH: Well, one thing, well, drugs definitely played a part in it. And, you know, when you, when things are new, they keep to guidelines for people coming in, but it seems like after a while all of that went out the window and I guess because of so many things –

[Whispered Conversation]

AH: because of things that were going on in the area, because in the early 70's, something happened in the Bronx where a lot of fires, a lot of people were burning up their, you know landlords, or whatever, you know, but here was a lot of fires going on and people needed immediate housing. So they dispensed with all of the guidelines that they had for people coming in, you know, and so you found that all kinds of folks, folks that didn't care about really keeping up the area, you know. Because very soon, I didn't know too many of my neighbors anymore because people started moving out, you know.

AH: And, as I said, it was in less than 10 years the place had deteriorated to such an extent that I really wanted to get out but because my salary just didn't allow me to, you know, I was there for as long as I was, you know. Because there was certain times that I had looked at places and was on the verge of signing on the dotted line but then I said no, I'm not going to really be able to afford this, you know, and so I have to say though, with my two kids, thank God, even though they were exposed to just about everything that you could imagine, you know, they came out to be two wonderful young people, you know, that I'm really proud of. My son is now, oh gosh, I'm always forgetting his title, but what he does is, he works with children that are handicapped to such an extent that, you know, they need someone to almost help them interpret in school, you know. So he's in a special school and he has a degree to, you know, work with the special kids that truly need, you know, special care and education. And my daughter, she works for the Police Department, she's an administrative aide. She's here in New York, my son's in Maryland, you know.

I: So that is such a perspective on going from the 60s and how things were good and then how, I understand, especially from what I've learned from Mark Naison recently about the fires that you mentioned, the burning of the Bronx and so on, so thank you for that perspective.

GC: It also affected our church too.

I: It affected your church? How did it affect your church?

GC: A lot of people went away. And we had to make the church smaller.

AH: Yes, yes definitely so. Because we had such a booming congregation at one time, you know, so as Mrs. C is saying, it definitely had its effect on our church. You know, so many of our good people feed the community, you know, for better, you know, for better.

I: He's showing me a picture of the interior of St. Augustine's. It really is a beautiful church.

GC: It isn't like that. It's not the same it was, the church.

I: It's been changed?

GC: Oh yes.

AH: Yes, well. You know, as Mrs. Crichlow said, as the congregation kept shrinking, one of our groups of brothers that were here and I think that was around '84 that they made a big change in the church where we had an altar put in the center of the church and the pews on either side facing the altar, instead of all pews and the front altar being the focus, so now we have a center altar with much smaller seating and of course a community area in the back of the church which was all once the church, you know, but it was cut.

I: Maybe sometime I can see it.

AH: Oh, definitely.

GC: Yes.

I: And these are pictures from some of the priests?

GC: Oh, this is all about the past, yes.

I: Maybe what we can do – maybe if I can make copies or something?

[Crosstalk]

GC: Well I knew all of them.

AH: [inaudible].

GC: Yes.

AH: And Father Bergen?

GC: Yes. I think he was here, 1948.

Virginia Dorsett (VD): I was three years old.

GC: What did you say?

VD: I was three.

AH: She was three and I was five.

[Laughter]

GC: You never know. And this is Spellman.

AH: Ok, that's Cardinal Spellman.

GC: And this [inaudible].

AH: Hey, this is something from 1949.

GC: The centennial.

AH: Centennial! The founding of St. Augustine, ok.

GC: And this shows you all the dates.

I: Do you think I could get copies of these? For this stuff? Because I'm going to write a paper at least on this one.

GC: I was going to let you read this.

AH: But you know, the copies probably would be better.

GC: Yes, take your time with it. It tells you –

AH: It starts in 1849.

I: Adrienne, why don't you read a little bit of it so we can put it on record with the tape?

GC: And remember, the church was a little house on Home Street.

I: How are we doing on the tape?

?2: A little bit and then we got to flip it.

I: Ok.

GC: It was a little house on Home Street. And this whole Maurisania area, including downtown, uptown, all around here, for that little church. And how many more churches is now? It's about 5 churches or 5 different places [inaudible]. But it's

[Crosstalk]

AH: Let me read a little bit of this because it's talking about exactly what you're saying. "In 1849, the first mass ever offered in the Bronx was celebrated in a private home, west side of Boston Road, nary opposite Home Street. This marked the beginning of St. Augustine's parish, in 1850 the Catholics of Maurisania bought one acre of land on the northeast corner of Franklin Avenue and Jefferson Street, for 300 dollars. A small wooden church was built on this site. I 1858 this was replaced by a brick church which was dedicated in 1860 by the most reverend John Hughes, first Archbishop of New York. Father Stephen [inaudible], first resident pastor of the parish died in 1863, to be succeeded by Father Joseph Woods. During Father Wood's administration, the old church building was converted to a parochial school in 1864 under the

direction of Miss Mitchell and two assistant teachers. This school lasted only a few years and had to be discontinued. It was during this time that the new parishes of St. Jerome, Immaculate Conception and St. Josephs were formed from what had been St. Augustine's parish. In 1874, Father McNamee became pastor. During his time the Ursuline Sisters attempted to organize a parochial school, but it only lasted a short time. In 1878, Father Nolan was appointed pastor. During his time, the church of St. Thomas Aquinas was founded. In September of 1887, Sister Gonzalez and Sister Clara Agnes reopened the parochial school under the direction of the Sisters of Charity with an average attendance of 100 children. In 1890, Father Thomas Grey became pastor and in 1891 the parish of St. Peter and Paul was formed from the lower part of St. Augustine's. On April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1894, fire totally destroyed the church. Instead of rebuilding on the same site, property was purchased at 167<sup>th</sup> and Franklin Avenue for 25,000 dollars." And this is where we are now. "On November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1895, Archbishop Michael Augustine Corrigan dedicated the new church at a mass issued by Bishop Gabriels of Ogdensburg, New York. The parochial school was opened at its present location in September of 1906 with a registration of 485. At this time the Christian Brothers began to teach in our school." So at least it tells you about the church opening and when the school was opened.

?: And we see right, [inaudible] St. Augustine.

[Crosstalk]

I: We got to flip our tapes over.

AH: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7

[End of Side 1]

[Begin Side 2]

I: So we're going to read a paragraph here.

AH: Oh, just to say that all these churches were formed from St. Augustine. St. Thomas Aquinas, St. John Chrysostom, Our Lady of Victory, St. Anthony, St. Angela Larrici, Saint's Peter and Paul and St. Anselm.

[Crosstalk]

AH: So the St. Anthony must be St. Anthony of Padua.

I: So we have a new person who has joined our group and I want to introduce here on tape. And your name is?

VD: My name is Virginia Dorsett.

I: And how do you spell your last name?

VD: D-O-R-S-E-T-T.

I: And you are a member of St. Augustine's church?

VD: Yes.

I: How long have you been in this area, all your life?

VD: No, I moved over to 166<sup>th</sup> street in 1966, yes in 66.

I: How old were you then?

VD: 21 I believe.

AH: But wouldn't you say you were in the area?

VD: First, well I was over, yes I was over –

AH: I mean I know. I didn't know that – I happen to know that we grew up in the same neighborhood [laughs].

I: So you lived in the Bronx all your life?

VD: No, I lived in Mount Vernon.

I: Oh, you were in Mount Vernon?

VD: Yes, I was in Mount Vernon first and I came here in '56, 1956.

I: Mount Vernon is just up in the Westchester area right? Just by Prospect?

VD: Yes.

I: And you came here 1956, to the Bronx area?

VD: Yes, to the Bronx area.

I: Ok, and you're a born Catholic as you say?

VD: Yes.

I: You were baptized as an infant?

VD: Yes.

I: Cradle Catholic as they say [Laughter]. And your folks were both Catholics?

VD: Yes, they were both Catholics.

I: Ok, and from the United States?

VD: Well from, well –

I: I say that because a lot of people from the West Indies that are Catholics.

VD: Yes, my mother is from the West Indies.

I: Oh she is. Ok, so I wasn't off base there. What part of the West Indies?

VD: Oh, St. Kitts.

I: Oh, St. Kitts. I know about St. Kitts.

VD: Saint Christopher on the Island.

I: Yes, other black Catholics that are St. Kitts. And – so that was both your folks?

VD: No. My father was from North Carolina.

I: Oh, ok. So your mom was from St. Kitts and your dad is from North Carolina.

VD: Yes, Edenton, North Carolina.

I: Edenton.

VD: E-D-E-N-T-I –

I: Oh, ok. And when did they, I guess they came up to – when you were, before you were born obviously.

VD: Yes, before I was born.

I: And they, what, did they go right to Mount Vernon, or did they go to another part of –

VD: Well I believe they were downtown, then they went to, you know, they went to Mount Vernon. Because I remember now I was in Mount Vernon when I was small.

I: Right, so they probably maybe were –

VD: In fact because I know on 170<sup>th</sup> Street I remember my mother telling me that – in fact where the new Senior place is, that's where our house was on 171<sup>st</sup> Street, yes. Right in that area there.

[Crosstalk]

VD: Yes, that's where my house was, on 171<sup>st</sup> Street between Park and Washington Avenue. Because I saw when the house was, you know, going down and whatnot in the area I said oh wow look at it, that's where I used to live. And that's when even, when the – when you was able to come across 171<sup>st</sup> Street there, before they tore that area, rather paved it or something so we couldn't go across the pass, you know, to get to the other side of West Avenue.

AH: Ok, you mean right where Our Lady of Victory is?

VD: Right, yes, that area. Because the train station is there so therefore they had the path that you go over. Now that's paved up.

I: So when you say downtown would that be all the way downtown in Manhattan or –

VD: Well 127<sup>th</sup> Street, 112<sup>th</sup> Street, we was at 135<sup>th</sup> Street. Yes, I don't know that they told me all those areas that, you know they –

I: They didn't ever talk about if they went to a church there did they?

VD: Well St. Aloysius. That was our church because my father worked for the nuns.

I: Oh really!

AH: The Handmaids –

VD: The Handmaids of Mary, Mary called it the Handmaids of Pure.

AH: The Most Pure –

VD: The Most Pure Holy Order.

I: That's an African American order isn't it?

AH: Yes it is.

I: I have met some of those sisters. So your dad worked as a sextant or –

VD: He was [inaudible].

I: A maintenance person?

VD: A maintenance, yes. He was maintenance.

I: For the sisters?

VD: Yes. He used to go to camp saying that it was, that's the camp that they have. In Staten Island. There's a camp in Staten Island, when I was a kid I went to that camp. And across the way was Mount Loretta, that was a girls camp that we used to play handball, not handball, baseball, stickball, you know, different things, yes.

I: Ok, so this is great. The Handmaids of Mary, are they – is their main convent on Staten Island.

VD: On 124<sup>th</sup> Street.

I: On 24<sup>th</sup> Street.

AH: No, 124<sup>th</sup>.

I: Oh, 124<sup>th</sup> street. But they had something else in Staten Island right?

VD: Well that's the camp. Now Camp St. Edward.

AH: Mount St. Edward?

VD: No, camp St. Edward.

I: And that's a camp only in the summertime or anytime?

VD: Well –

GC: Summertime.

[Crosstalk]

VD: it was Summer Camp.

AH: I mean the lady that just came in, I have to say, we have a lot in common, our sons have been friends since head start in St. Augustine, and they still good friends.

I: And your name is?

Miriam Boney (MB): Miriam Boney.

I: Miriam –

MB: B-O-M-E-Y.

I: B-O-M-E-Y. So, now we have 1,2,3,4 people on this tape recorder [Laughter] and growing!

Let me make sure I just have some basic information from Virginia. So, Virginia did you go to St. Augustine's school, or another school here?

VD: No. I went to St. Aloysius.

I: Oh, in Harlem.

VD: In Harlem, yes.

I: That was your grade school education?

VD: Yes.

I: Were there a lot of blacks there at that time?

VD: Yes.

I: That was probably in the 50's?

VD: Yes, that was in the 50's because I had to ride the train from, because I was in Mount Vernon then and I was 5 years old and my sister, she was 7 and we rode the New Haven train and we travelled, because my father worked for the New York Central – at that time they called it the New York Central, Met North-Central or whatever, Metro North, the New York Central and New Haven train

[Crosstalk].

VD: I know, I even know the stops, you know. New Haven, Mount Vernon, Columbus Avenue, Pelham Bay, New Rochelle, Largetmont, Mamaroneck, Harrison, Ramapo, Port Chester, Greenwich [inaudible], Greenwich, Stanford.

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

I: He was a conductor on the trains?

VD: No, he was a trackman. He was a trackman.

I: A trackman, oh.

VD: Yes, but while I was riding the trains, you know, and that's what they would be –

I: So you came all the way down there because...

VD: Mount Vernon to 125<sup>th</sup>?

I: ...there was no school that at --

VD: Yes, there was a school at that time but since my father worked for St. Aloysius --

[Crosstalk]

VD: So I was able to school. And then in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade I went to Mount Carmel in Mount Vernon. In fact I was the first black to enter that school.

I: Really?

VD: Yes.

I: 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Mount Carmel.

VD: Our Lady of Mount Carmel on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue and 10<sup>th</sup> Street.

I: 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue and 10<sup>th</sup> street? All the way on the Lower East Side you went?

VD: No, this was in Mount Vernon.

I: Oh, in Mount Vernon, oh ok, I'm sorry [laughs]. And you were the first black to go there?

VD: Yes. In fact they were so glad to have me there because I was the first black person to be able to play Gasper, one of the wise men.

[Laughter]

VD: They said we don't have to pay out a genuine.

[Crosstalk]

VD: And the teacher called me ebony. People said, teacher call you ebony? I felt good because that was hard, black wood, you know. I was a strong young, I said I was a tomboy too so therefore you know, it didn't –

AH: It didn't faze you.

I: And you didn't mind being the wise man either.

VD: No!

[Laughter]

VD: I felt good playing that part because I was playing something in Jesus –

I: And you were the first one and the only one at that time?

VD: In the school at that time, but then after when there was others but I was, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and –

GC: What year was that?

VD: 1953, '54.

GC: See mine was 1936, no I graduated in '36 so it must have been later than '54 then.

VD: I know it was in the 50's.

I: Yes, we have some other –

[Crosstalk]

I: It's going to be hard to transcribe this part [laughs]. Gertrude was the first black student at Our Lady of Victory.

GC: Right, I remember graduating in '36 so it must be 8 years before that I came into the school, that makes it something in the 20's, '29, '28 something like that. And I didn't get the same treatment you got. They didn't know who I was or where I came from.

VC: They didn't – they really didn't know who I was. I had a little problems because they had problems with African people, blacks, you know, I mean the children, some of them did and I know I had one bad experience that, I guess he was, yes, Italian, he called me the n-word as being a tomboy I couldn't let him get away with that. But the thing that really bothered me is because, with my temper I almost sent him out of here and we had to pray and prayer works and ever since that I told myself, Lord just give me strength not to allow my temper to, you know, to take me. And any time I feel that my temper flares I just say, I'm not going to jail for no one, I'm not going to jail for none and that's when I know that I'm really full so there I knew so therefore I know move from that person. See I'm full now just even thinking about it, because, just knowing what happened to that boy what could've happened, you know, I might not even be here today because I would've really took him out of here.

I: Did you get into trouble because of it.

VD: No I didn't get in trouble, no.

AH: It was on the school property?

VD: It was on the school property.

AH: But it would cost the school –

VD: No, it was, no – because the boy he initially – he did it to me –

I: And they understood that, the sisters understood that.

VD: Yes.

GC: They learned from you.

[Crosstalk]

I: So I guess that everybody knew to not to do that anymore.

VD: Yes, because for what he did, you know, and because I was the only black one there, I guess that's why they must have took it the way they did, you know, how they handled it.

I: Did you feel a change in the rest of the kids after that happened or did you feel at that point that you had established yourself there.

VD: Yes, but see the lord didn't allow me to know, you know, I'm bad you know. The lord gave me that humbleness, you know, so I'm – and even until today with a lot of things, because I go through a lot of things, and he – and when things happen, because I have that aggressiveness and I, if I'm right, if I feel I'm right, I'm going all the way to the end and then when I win, I this – I just let it be, I don't let my head swell. And I thank God for that, you know, so you have to know when things like, whenever anything happens just to know, when you do win, you be humble about it, you do not get up there and wave arms, yes, you know how they get. And this is what I try to teach my kids and my grandkids, you know. You don't allow winning to swell your head.

I: That's a good lesson. So then you got to – what's your connection to St. Augustine's then? So I know you were in, you went to Mount Vernon, Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Did you, ok, what the next?

VD: When I came to the Bronx, I went to Poor Lawrence Dunbar and –

I: Ok, that's a high school?

AH: Junior high.

VD: Junior high, yes. Because that was the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and then from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade then I went to Taft. Yes, so on 100 – that's on 170<sup>th</sup>. [inaudible] Walton Avenue, I mean Morris Avenue.

I: Morris Avenue. Were those good schools?

VD: Well –

I: And so were they considered – these are public schools I assume.

VD: Yes, these are public schools now. I'm in public school now.

AH: They were considered so at the time.

I: They were safe? They were –

VD: Yes. Yes, you know, to me it was safe because –

I: Nobody's going to mess with you though.

[Laughter]

VD: I was the war council.]

[Laughter]

GC: Peacemaker, war councilor both together.

I: Then these – were – you started going to the St. Augustine's church.

VD: Church, I started going to the St. Augustine's and I had my daughter in 1966 and she came here Pre-K. In fact, right down in this area, you know, in our church, she was in Pre-K. And she graduated from Pre-K, I even still have a picture of her and she's what, 37 years old now and my grandson he's 18, you know, so.

AH: I remember in those days, we had Pre-K here but we didn't have Kindergarten because my kids went to Pre-K and then they had to go to 55 for Kindergarten and then they came back to St. Augustine's.

VD: Mine went to 236 after Pre-K, yes.

I: What else, any other involvement with besides your kids going here, you don't really – how – what's your connection to St. Augustine's, how do you feel about St. Augustine's?

VD: I feel good about St. Augustine's. See when I had moved here and I was coming to church each Sunday, now I was, like I said, a person of, you know, strength, you know, I was also a partying person, but every Sunday morning I struggled in here, I don't care how I was, I struggled in here, so that mainly, I thank the lord for that, you know, for St. Augustine's because it was right, I lived down here on 166<sup>th</sup> street and my building is not there anymore but it's right next to, what's that building down there, the fellows are, Basics.

AH: Oh, Basics.

VD: My building was right next to Basics but they tore my building down, but Basic is the building that was next to mine.

AH: It's like a men's –

I: Was this a good area, now we're talking 60's now, this was a good area to live in?

[Crosstalk]

GC: And the fires –

AH: Because this is almost pre-fire time.

I: After the 70's is when things started deteriorating?

AH: Yes.

VD: Now see, now that's when I had moved over to the West Bronx, over by the Cross-Bronx Expressway, but then every so often I would come back to St. Augustine's, you know and then in '93, that's when I came back to St. Augustine's permanently, even though I still live in the West Bronx I travel.

AH: Maybe it's going to be interesting to tell how – what kind of brought you back?

VD: Well, the gospel choir first of all, by me I remember hearing them sing, you know, and I said one day I'm going to be in that choir. And that one day came.

I: This was '92 you said?

VD: '90, no '93.

I: '93, you guys had – you still have a gospel choir now?

VD: Yes. The gospel choir started in what, the 80's?

AH: 70's.

VD: Yes, and let's see, I was – I always heard the choir, I always said I was going to join the choir but I knew I wasn't up to par yet because of my lifestyle, you know, and I knew I couldn't

serve on both sides, you know, but I knew that I was getting here, but I knew I wasn't able to get up there to sing, then coming back and forth and listening to the choir and the choir grew and it was strong, you know. And the songs that they would sing made me feel good and –

AH: Tell her about the concert in [inaudible] say a little bit about that.

VD: Which one, oh yes. There was a gentleman that was going to the church were I'm at over at St. Francis of Assisi. And he left that church and came to St. Augustine's and he was practicing to be a priest but then he said no, so he came to St. Augustine's and he was in the choir. And when I came over to St. Augustine's I saw him and he says oh, Virginia, Virginia, you know, he was go glad to see me and whatnot and then he was leaving to move away, to go out of state and he said, this is my road, and he says I am not leaving here until you join the choir. I said no, I'm not joining no choir Kevin, no I'm not joining no choir, no, no, no I'm not ready to join the choir yet. You're going to join the choir unless I'm not leaving and you know I have to leave and he knew the type of person I was, that, you know, I mean I knew he was going to go anyway but I said ok, I don't like people to be begging and whatnot so I said ok. Sure en – and I lost my mother that year too. And – but I joined the choir, he gave me his role and I joined the choir that year.

GC: It started 1971. With Henrietta Blakely, remember her?

AH: Mrs. Blakely, I remember Mrs. Blakely yes.

GC: And Thomas Pilecki, Terrence Parker.

VD: And that was another thing with Thomas Pilecki. I said yes, that's another thing, I'm coming to – and they could train my voice, you know I'm in – he has a way –

AH: He has such a, just ranges of things that we didn't think we could, you know, do, you know. He took us into the pomp and ceremony type of song, the inspirational type and of course the gospel, you know. But it was such a variety at the time that the was here and then during the time he was here we had a lot of men.

GC: Yes.

AH: We had maybe at one time at least a dozen men in the choir. And –

GC: Terrence Parker, and you know Roger was something that sometimes too -- He works at the ministry in the church now. And he works for Our Lady of Victory.

VD: He's the choir director.

AH: He's the choir director at Our Lady of Victory but he was once our choir director for a while, you know. We've had a number of them since of course '72 when we started up. I didn't – I wasn't even with the choir then, I came around '84.

VD: I just knew that I would – that the choir, I would, you know, Tom and Ray, I said oh I'm going to be under them so now they could let me know how to sing from the diaphragm because my voice is – the Lord gave me a beautiful voice, however I just felt form the diaphragm, I wanted to understand that but I never got to understand it [Laughter]. But I'm still singing though.

AH: And he could teach music. But some of us never got to that, you know, we never really got – I didn't, you know, but there was that before we had gotten into choir that, actually in that time he was teaching them how to read music and everything too but we came in at a different time so that wasn't going I think any longer but still we learned a lot.

I: So the gospel choir was a big attraction for people.

AH: Oh my gosh, I can't tell you how many, you know, people even in my life of my relatives and of my friends that I wasn't trying to drag them or evangelize them into St. Augustine's but I simply invited them to something and they came and they never left. [Laughter]. You know, some of my sisters, you know, and some of my coworkers, you know became members of the church just by coming and hearing the choir and of course the service and everything too but the choir was definitely an attraction, you know, because people would tell us walking down Franklin Avenue on any given Sunday morning they could hear us, they could hear us. Our numbers have dwindled over the years, you know, but we still strong.

VD: It's going to come back. It's going to come back. We strong but it's going to come back. It's going to rise above.

I: So Miriam Boney?

MB: Yes.

I: Boney. Can you tell us something about yourself? B-O-N-E-Y.

MB: Well I didn't go to school up here. All my schooling was down south and then I graduated from down south and when I came up here I did graduate from College of New Rochelle and my high school and elementary school was down south.

I: Where in the south?

MB: Charleston, South Carolina.

I: Oh, isn't that where your folks were from?

GC: Yes but I never saw here though.

[Laughter]

I: Charleston, South Carolina.

AH: As a baby.

[Laughter]

I: So did you -- were you baptized as an infant?

MB: Yes. And then I was convert, I converted to Catholic in '63.

I: Oh, you were baptized as something else?

MB: Yes, as a Baptist, sorry I meant as a Methodist.

I: Oh, you were -- you were baptized as a Methodist. And 1963 is when you converted to Catholicism.

MB: Yes.

I: And was that here?

MB: Right here.

I: Oh, St. Augustine's, ok. And what made you do that?

MB: Well, at the time my cousin and I were, I was living with my cousin and she had attended here with her child so I started going to church with her and I love it. I love it because all during the years I was going to church but I just couldn't find something that really, you know, pleased me, you know. So when I came here I fell in love with it. So --

I: What was it that really struck you?

MB: I just – I love everything about it, I – even though at the time, trying to be a convert I didn't understand everything. But I just love everything, I love the sisters, I still do. I remember the sisters from the school and I just fall in love with the church so – and then my kids, they started going here, you know, they graduated from St. Augustine's school and – all four of my kids, you know and I never left. I just love it.

AH: You used to be in the choir.

MB: I used to be in the choir too.

I: In 1963, that was the division time, the mass was probably still in Latin.

MB: Yes, a little bit.

I: And then in 1965 is when the transition happened to the vernacular. How did you feel about the Latin mass? Was it strange?

MB: Well, since at that time I didn't know too – nothing about Latin and – but I don't know I just, it just looked like it just, you know, is something that is drawn to you and it just feel like this is the place I should be. And eventually I just fell right into it, you know and I love it. And then as things start changing a little bit I was right there with it as [inaudible] start teaching the Sunday, help teaching with the Sunday School and just like Adrienne said I was in the choir and –

AH: I was here assistant in Sunday school for a little, minute [Laughs].

MB: I was one of the originals.

AH: I know you were I was your assistant for a hot minute.

GC: In Sunday school?

AH: Yes, see that's why I said [inaudible].

GC: I didn't know that. And I been there all the time and I didn't notice here.

[Laughter]

I: Is Sunday School the same thing as the CCD classes?

MB: Yes.

I: Oh, ok. And when did those happen?

MB: 1971 started.

I: Oh, 1971. And what day of the week?

AH: Sunday.

I: Oh, on Sunday. It was like in between masses or –

MB: Before you go to mass.

I: Before you went to mass, that's when you got there. So the children would come early then, before church.

MB: About an hour. You know, the same thing is happening now. We still have a Sunday school. Mrs. Crichlow [inaudible]. And –

I: And the lay people are the ones who teach now?

MB: Yes.

I: Did they ever have sisters teaching it?

GC: Sisters have been teaching when they have the afterschool program on Wednesday they would come. Remember?

AH: Yes. Religious Instruction.

GC: Yes. On Wednesday, that's when the teachers, the sisters would teach that. Remember that?

AH: Yes.

I: And that was for children who went to public school?

AH: Exactly. Exactly.

GC: Because they changed it to Sunday.

I: What about adult education? Religious education? Father Segrew, or former Father Segrew mentioned yesterday that there was quite an adult education program in the 50's, now maybe you guys weren't, now you would've been here, right Gertrude, at that time?

GC: In the 50's I was here but I was educated already [laughs] you know –

I: You, but you remember them being –

GC: Adult education, what kind of education?

I: Well they were like convert classes you might call them.

GC: Oh no. Well there probably were but I wasn't supposed to be involved in it because I was –

I: Do you remember them happening then?

GC: I remember the college programs we had, did you graduate from here in --

MB: No.

GC: And they had college programs here, New Rochelle, Manhattan College. That was in – then we had a religious program downstairs for about a couple years where you could get credits, you know anything about that?

I: Yes. Father Segrew mentioned that. That was a way of getting people into something. You had to have a high school diploma but if you didn't you could attend this particular program with accredited professors and automatically you were considered a High School Graduate. And then you could do something else in that [inaudible] school.

GC: It's probably the other program. Because the college program was college, it was for college and then you could get credits.

AH: Right, college credits and that went on here?

GC: Yes, you know. Ask Dorothy about it. Dorothy Lewis. She was involved and some of the nuns were. A number of people, used to come here, come down, I don't know how many, twice a week and they had leadership programs. We had so many programs, leadership programs.

AH: CYO, the brothers.

GC: Yes. But the leadership program was adults.

I: The CYO. Did they have any CYO dances or anything like that?

GC: Oh yes [Laughs] Sister Michael, [inaudible] member of the school. She would have, it was called the CYO, and she would have these dances for kids in the school that got all of the kids and she used to make me come down and sit with her.

AH: Oh, you would chaperone.

GC: Yes. [Laughter] Sister Regina Michael was a dancer.

AH: Ok. I could see that. I could see that. She was full of life, that's for sure. Regina yes.

GC: So many things going here. And [inaudible] with the teachers program across the street.

The brothers run that. What was it called?

AH: I'm trying to remember what that – because it was some letters, there were some letters to that program.

GC: We worked three and a half years, for three and a half years. It came from Washington, DC.

What's the name of the Mother that came from Washington, DC. Don't you remember that money came in?

AH: Do you have pictures of that? Because remember you showed – one day, the pictures.

GC: Oh I have that yes. I have those pictures from those –

MB: Sister Janet Jevieve was in charge yes.

[Crosstalk]

I: I want to ask you guys and this is for anybody to answer, or all of you. I'm going to put it kind of a tough way but I kind of want to get your gut feeling about this. In speaking to African American Catholics they sometimes say they've been asked by Protestant African Americans why do you want to go to a white man's church? What is your reaction to that question?

GC: It's the faith we build, it's the what we build in. You could have a black priest here now or a white priest and maybe the black priest we won't like him we'd prefer the white priest because of a spiritual, you know, you follow from here. I never think about black and white when I go to church.

MB: I never do either. It didn't make any difference.

GC: I think about what – Jesus is there what, you know – I mean maybe somebody else feels different now.

VD: Well whoever they send that is what's in your hart. Just like Mrs. Crichlow said, faith, you know, your strong belief, it's what you believe in. So the color of your skin has nothing to do with it. Now if you are one, whichever color you are and you are not sending off the message and not doing the homily correctly or you are a priest that has bad – you know, just not doing things right then that come, then that's when you worry about it at. But other than that, as long as you, you know, in your heart, and the faith that you have the color does not matter as long as he is able to come across and understand where African Americans are coming from because some of them blend in though. The white priest, they blend in, some of them do to, you know, the background of their African American, you know, and follow onto what we have and then some of them don't.

GC: Oh yes.

AH: I was going to say.

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

GC: Yes, Father Jeffers, they called him a black priest [laughter]. He brought the choir here and the other Catholics, remember the other Catholics left because he brought the, what's it called?

AH: Gospel Choir.

GC: I think my husband left because of that, he went to St. Anthony's.

I: Some black people don't like the gospel choir.

AH: Some black people just like everyone else have a very traditional mind, you know, and so there were, and there probably still are some that may not be so comfortable with it that have remained though because they just have their other ties to this place, you know the people and you know, so, you just sometimes have to say 3 out of 4 is not bad, you know. I mean you could go from the frying pan into the fire, you know, why run, you know. As Mrs. Crichlow was saying, Father Jeffers was definitely, international [laughter] you know what I mean.

GC: He would try to dance [Laugh].

AH: The electric slide, doing whatever we do.

GG: And we marched down the church, you know as the choir marched in, he's doing a two step like, [laugh]. He tried so hard.

AH: When I had my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party down here I can see Father and I now doing something, boogieing out there, you know.

GC: Right, [Laughter].

MB: That's right. I really don't see no difference myself. I never felt that the, just like Virginia said, as long as you feel somebody is relaying the message of God's word, you don't see color. I was always comfortable when I came and I came [inaudible] was alright with Father Cain and, loved him to death, because we remember him, he was always used to walk around the neighborhood to talk to the people, you know. And you didn't see color, you know, the only thing you see, if you get the message and you can relate to the priest, you feel comfortable, you don't see color, you know. And I always felt that way, you know.

I: So what about the Eucharist? Is that an important part of your faith?

AH: Of course.

[Crosstalk, Agreement]

I: So you would miss that if you went to a Baptist or something, you would miss the Eucharist.

GC: I wouldn't go to the Baptist.

I: You wouldn't go to the Baptist [Laughs].

WB: See I did, you know, as – for the first 18 years of my life I was a Protestant, over 18. And so I could, when I go home I could, I do go to church because I take my mother and my families down there and everybody in my family, I have one or two cousins that, they call us the strays. They became Catholic and she love it too. And we still go to church, we still go to the church, you know, but I know the difference is, I mean I still love the church too because that's my beginning, but I don't think I could revert back, this is what I love, you know. But I still love the Protestant church too but I wouldn't revert back, you know.

AH: Yes, It's just like I, I was really very pleased when the time came that it wasn't understood that we weren't, there was a time when we shouldn't go to other churches, you know. And I was really happy about the time when, not only could we go to other churches, but our priests were interacting with all kinds of ministers, you know, rabbi's and preachers, and everybody, you know had forums where they came together and realize that we all, you know.

I: Did they ever have a visiting, where they would switch pulpits. I know the Queen of Angels in Newark had this with the black Baptist. The priest and the black Baptist would switch pulpits, I mean they would come and visit and preach, did you ever have anything like that here?

VD: A few times, someone. We had visitors and they would do the homily, well they would still be doing the homily, I don't think they were Catholic.

WB: They Catholic, they Catholic, I assume they all Catholic.

I: Oh, you're saying they were Catholic, I'm saying this is –

[Crosstalk]

AH: Another denomination?

VD: Oh that's right, Jesuit is Catholic.

[Crosstalk]

I: Anything else?

AH: I would like to see that.

[Laughter]

I: Well obviously he didn't do the mass.

AH: Right, right and [inaudible].

I: He would give the sermon, you know and then the priest would go to the Baptist –

GC: I [inaudible] let you know who it was and he knows it wasn't a Catholic priest, I mean maybe somebody come to give us a message and we want to hear it but we could – we have to know he's not a Catholic priest.

I: Right, absolutely.

GC: Announce that he's –

I: Right, oh, yes, absolutely.

GC: Remember that priest that came? I think from, from the South and he came with the white –

VD: Oh, he's from St. Augustine's in New Orleans!

[Crosstalk]

GC: When he came in at the mass, they marched in, all of the –

AH: Yes, because he had his African garb on, ok, excuse me, yes.

GC: He had on this white, bright white, white hat.

AH: He looked like a cook!

GC: I thought the cook was coming [Laughter]. Like ok, the cook came in and then the people in the church, after choir was done. I said, my goodness! But then he turned around and started preaching! I said, cook, what is this, I was really – It didn't look like a priest [Laughs]. Of course I felt bad right afterwards, a priest and that was African also, but he didn't, it didn't look like African. After our priest [inaudible], right.

AH: You're right, this was last year.

GC: And the cook's hat, white, and white, and white, everything on it, oh no [laughs]. When he turned around and started preaching I couldn't believe.

AH: I know that's what you didn't say but I heard some other comments from people about the cook coming in, you know.

[Inaudible, Laughter]

AH: Yes he did, because it was – the mass was done New Orleans style.

GC: Sometimes we get different styles of masses.

AH: He came with immunizations and everything, yes.

I: He had drums and –

AH: They had a drummer.

GC: The drummer.

VD: They played our drums, when they played our drums.

I: Oh, you have drums with the Gospel Choir.

AH: Oh, yes.

I: Do they have an organ, do they play an organ or a piano or both?

MB: Both, both.

AH: Both, the organ isn't played much anymore, really. Usually the keyboard or the piano, sometimes, you know, the organ but not often.

I: Well I think we're at the end of the tape almost and I'm going to come back again, and I can't – I don't know when, but this has been great. This has been really, really wonderful.

AH: Yes, because I said, at first I said, you know, I really didn't want to come because my memory is so – and I said, is the person going to have some questions [laughter]. You know, but when you hear others talking, then it refuels you and, you know you can –

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[End of Interview]