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Cruz, Marilyn

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Interviewers: Dr. Mark Naison, Princess Okieme, Andrew Tiedt
Interviewee: Marilyn Cruz
November 3, 2005

Mark Naison (MN): This is the 131st interview of the Bronx African American History Project. We are at Fordham University on November 3rd, 2005 and we're interviewing Marilyn Cruz who grew up in the Hunt's Point section of the Bronx and is going to be able to talk a lot about both that community and the whole process of cultural mixture that was going on in that neighborhood in the 40s, 50s, and 60s. So, to start off with, Marilyn, tell us a little bit about your family background and then we'll talk about how they came to the Bronx. What part of the world did your mother and father come from?

Marilyn Cruz (MC): My mother's family is from Barbados and my father's family is from the South.

MN: Where did they meet?

MC: They met in New York.

MN: In what community?

MC: In Harlem. I was born in Harlem.

MN: You were born in Harlem. When did your mother's family migrate to the United States?

MC: Oh gosh, I don't know. 1910, I would say. Around 1910.

MN: And they lived in Harlem?

MC: They lived in Harlem.

MN: Were they a member of any church in Harlem that you remember?

MC: St. Ambrose.

MN: OK. And what street was that on?

MC: 130th and 5th Avenue.

MN: Did you grow up going to that church?

MC: I certainly did.

MN: And you have memories of it?

MC: Oh sure.

MN: Were there many members--what was your mother's family's name?

MC: Guy.

MN: G-U-Y?

MC: G-U-Y.

MN: OK. Were there a lot of Guys?

MC: There were a lot of Guys. [Laughter] There were a lot of Guys in the community. There was a lot of, I guess, Barbadians in that church. The priest, Elliot Duran, was from Barbados and his kids grew up with us and it was more of a family thing than a formal church kind of thing. It's an Episcopal church and we had lots of social activities there. There were a lot of concerts and dance concerts and all kinds of children's activities that I was very fond of.

MN: Wow. Now, how old were you when your family moved to the Bronx?

MC: 10. We moved in 1945.

MN: Right. What--did you go to the public elementary school in Harlem?

MC: I went to PS 113. I lived on 111th and 7th Avenue, right opposite Central Park. That was my playground and I went to PS 113. And we moved to the Bronx--I was still in elementary school and I went to PS 39--I think for my last year.

MN: Right. Now, were the Guys involved in West Indian associations of any kind or social clubs outside of the church?

MC: I don't think so. No.

MN: Did you go to any events at which West Indian music was being played or--

MC: At home all the time.

MN: OK. What about cricket, did anybody--

MC: No, no one was playing cricket. My grandfather was a shoemaker and he had his own business on 114th St. and 8th Avenue, and I remember one of the favorite things about it was they used to let the business owners put play cards to the movies in their windows and get free tickets and my cousin and I went to the [inaudible] Theater every Saturday morning for free, free tickets, and that was one of the best perks that I can remember from being in Harlem.

MN: Right. What was your recollection of the neighborhood in Harlem and the atmosphere as a child?

MC: The neighborhood was--like I say, Central Park was my playground. I was free--I had--we had cousins--it was like a four block radius. We had so many cousins living around in the same area and we used to gather on 111th St. and go to the park and play in Central Park and then come home. We had to be home when the streetlights went on, couldn't be out--get caught out when the streetlights went on.

MN: What was the nature of the housing, were you living in apartment buildings?

MC: I was living in an apartment building that had an elevator man, which was unusual at that time in that area, but we had an elevator man. It was a corner building that I had an aunt that lived a few doors up in the middle of the block. It was a much smaller building, and I was born actually in the next block, between Morningside and 8th.

MN: OK. Now, your father's family was southern?

MC: My father's family was southern but I didn't really know much about them except some cousins. He had cousins who owned nightclubs in Manhattan, in Harlem--

MN: Wow.

MC: --bars, several bars.

MN: And your father was from what state?

MC: Savannah, Georgia.

MN: He's from Savannah, Georgia, and what--

MC: Actually, he was born in Pineland South Carolina.

MN: Right. Now, you mentioned right before we started the interview that there was a lot of mixing of cultures and races in both sides of the family. If you could talk a little bit first about the Basian side, then the southern side.

MC: Well, the Basian side, of course, it was very mixed. We were British and Black, mixed on the islands. The most I know about the Basian side--my grandmother's family we were all very attached to. My grandfather's family was--we didn't know them very well. He had one brother that I knew of and I sometime down the road got a hold of a letter that was written from the captain of a ship where my great-grandfather was a merchant seaman or a sailor, and he did aboard ship, and the captain of the ship wrote my great-grandmother a letter telling her "thank God she was rid of him, he was no good". [Laughter] And I'm pretty sure he was white, my great-grandmother may have been a native Barbadian, whatever. And for some reason he deserted her and he went off to the navy and he died aboard ship.

MN: Well, one of the questions we've raised-- because, you know, people from the Caribbean have different concepts of race than people from the United States do--did your family talk--was race a big subject in your family?

MC: Never. Never. No, it wasn't about race it was about class, maybe? There was a lot of class-consciousness. It depended--whatever family you came from was important, more than

what color that family was. If I were to bring a young man home, the first thing my grandfather would say is "What's his name? Where's he from?" You know, that sort of thing.

MN: What sort of occupations were the Guys involved in?

MC: All three of my uncles served in the war, so they were all soldiers. And when they came home, one uncle became a policeman, and two--my other two uncles became bus drivers. All of my aunts went into civil service that I know of.

MN: How did your mother and father meet in Harlem?

MC: I don't know but my father wasn't very welcomed to the family. [Laughter]

MN: So she--they didn't approve of this marriage?

MC: No, they didn't approve. My grandfather didn't approve.

MN: Was your father somebody with a regular occupational status?

MC: I'm not even sure that was the issue. The fact was, he was from the South and he wasn't from the West Indies, and he wasn't anyone who my grandfather see the family or know who the family was or whatever.

MN: OK. So, he had several strikes against him--

MC: Definitely.

MN: --One, he was southern and not West Indian; two, he didn't have a clear family with a tradition comparable to the Guys. And was there anything else?

MC: No, that was enough. That was enough.

MN: Did your father stay with the family after they were married for a long period of time?

MC: No, my mother and father separated when I was about 10 or 11 years-old.

MN: And what are your recollections of him before that time?

MC: My dad?

MN: Yes.

MC: Oh, he smelled wonderful and he was so handsome. Oh, my gosh.

MN: Oh, OK. Tell us a little bit about his background with the racial mix--he was very handsome?

MC: Oh, he was.

MN: And he smelled good?

MC: Yes. He was--well, he worked for his cousins in their bars in Harlem as a bartender.

MN: He was a bartender.

MC: And they used to have these contests in Harlem, the most popular bartender. And he frequently won--you know, the women were always after him [Laughter]. Thus, the separation and divorce, I guess, after the four kids.

MN: Oh, OK. So, if you were married to the most popular bartender in Harlem--

MC: You had a difficult time.

MN: --you had a difficult time. Now I assume that your mother must have been very, very attractive as well.

MC: My mother was a beautiful lady and she was also a barmaid.

MN: She was a barmaid?

MC: Only after some years. In the beginning she was a hat designer for a company called Cartagena in Lower Manhattan and I remember her frequently taking me to work with her and I could watch her design hats, and--

MN: Do you know if she was a member of a union?

MC: I don't know. I don't really know. I do know that the company moved north, I think, to Connecticut or somewhere, and they did ask my mother to relocate, and my father wouldn't have

it, so she stayed here.

MN: Now, there were four children. What was the birth order--your position in the family?

MC: I'm the youngest.

MN: You're the youngest.

MC: The brat.

MN: And how much older were your other siblings?

MC: There's five years between myself and my oldest sibling, so there was like one and a half years between us, going down the--

MN: In Harlem, did your mother and father have their own apartment or did they live in the same apartment as your grandparents?

MC: No, they had an apartment in the first, I think, and the newest projects, the Harlem River Projects, which was four stories high. They were really wonderful; growing up there was really, really, remarkable. The tennis courts, they had all kinds of--

MN: You had tennis courts in public housing.

MC: We had tennis courts in public housing. It was really marvelous.

MN: And this was in the 40s?

MC: This was in the 30s, the late 30s we moved there.

MN: Do you have fond memories of your Harlem years?

MC: Oh, sure.

MN: And so what led your family to move to the Bronx.

MC: My grandfather bought a house, at the end of the war, my grandfather bought a house in the Bronx. And let's see how it went...I think it was all around the same time. My parents separated, my grandfather bought the house, and my other siblings went various places: one with my

mother, one went to Georgia--

MN: Wow. So you went to live with your grandparents, where did your mother live?

MC: My mother still lived in Harlem.

MN: And did she stay there?

MC: She stayed there a considerable length of time. My father lived in Washington Heights for a while and then moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, and he bought a hotel there and it was named Hotel Marilyn. But it was a terrible disappointment when I did get [Laughs] when I did get there to see it. It was quite disappointing. As a matter of fact, it was Daisy and Clarence that took me. There was a Convention, a Shriner's Convention in Indianapolis at the time and they called my father and said "can we come stay at your hotel?" And he said "sure. Bring Marilyn." And I went and I came back home.

MN: Do you want to elaborate on what disappointed you?

MC: It was one of those transient hotels.

MN: Like a Skid Row kind of--

MC: No Skid Row, but really transient.

MN: were you around music a lot when you were growing up in Harlem? Was this very much part of your upbringing?

MC: Yes. Calypso music, West Indian music. Some Calypso music I remember my grandfather no allowing us to listen to. Like, I remember one called "Stone Cold Dead in the Market".

MN: "Stone Cold Dead in the Market".

MC: My grandfather would not let us listen to this song. I don't remember all of the words, but he was very much against that particular song and, I guess, others like it.

MN: Through your father were you exposed to much jazz and rhythm and blues at all?

MC: No, not at all.

MN: And you didn't go to hear live music during the Harlem years other than at church?

MC: No, I did. Very often the clubs down there had live music.

MN: And you went to the clubs with which--with your parents?

MC: With my parents. Like I said, they were both bartenders, barmaids, and they were in that social kind of life, so--

MN: Did your mother remain a barmaid after you moved in with your grandparents?

MC: Yes.

MN: What did your grandparents think of your mother working as a barmaid?

MC: I'm sure they weren't happy about it. I think they also weren't happy that my father was in that business.

MN: They were very proper?

MC: Yes.

MN: And had that West Indian--

MC: My grandfather particularly. My grandmother was very gentle, very sweet lady; my grandfather was--

MN: People talk of the West Indian gentleman of the old school.

MC: Yes.

MN: You mentioned something of your father, that he had a mixed background racially and ethnically.

MC: Yes.

MN: Could you describe that?

MC: Well, y father was part Cherokee, part Black and part Irish. And his family that migrated

here that he worked for, the name was Farrell. The bars were Farrell's Bar, and that was Farrell's Tavern, was on 129th, I think, and 7th. One was the Cozy Corner on 146th and 8th.

MN: Is that still there?

MC: I don't know.

MN: That's a great title--

MC: The other was the Hucklebuck [Laughter].

MN: The Hucklebuck? You're kidding.

MC: No, the Hucklebuck on 132nd, I think, and 7th or Lennox, I can't remember. And he had one on 125th st. on the West Side which I never frequented. But those three, I frequented because those three my father worked in.

MN: Now, when you say you frequented, this was even as a child you would go there? Or you're talking more of as a--

MC: Oh no, as a child. Not as an adult, as a child.

MN: So this was something--there was an atmosphere where you could feel safe--

MC: Oh sure. They used to sit me on the end of the bar and everybody used to give me quarters and dollars [Laughter] for my little pocketbook.

MN: Now, were the people who went to these bars tend to be dressed to the nines?

MC: Oh yes. This was a time when everybody was very sharp.

MN: Guys with the fedora hats and the whole nine yards? OK. What were your feelings about moving to the Bronx, were you initially resistant to doing this?

MC: I don't know if it was resistance, but maybe a little bit of excitement because we were going someplace new. The Bronx was sort of considered like the country. I was a kid in Harlem, the Bronx was the country. It was not the city.

MN: Now, did your family move to the Bronx because they knew other people from their church or family or community who were doing this?

MC: I think it may have been so, because we ended up on a block where quite a few people from Barbados did have homes--that's where we bought our home.

MN: And were any of the people on the block St. Ambrose people?

MC: I think yes, the Hinksons.

MN: So there was a whole--and was this considered a step up from Harlem?

MC: Yes.

MN: This was like today moving to the suburbs.

MC: Like moving to the suburbs, yes. Right.

MN: And did your family immediately associate itself with the Episcopal Church there?

MC: Oh, sure.

MN: So they didn't stay in St. Ambrose, they then joined St. Margaret's down the block.

MC: Right.

MN: What were your recollections of St. Margaret's? Was St. Margaret's a more racially mixed church than St. Ambrose when you first started going there?

MC: Oh certainly. St. Ambrose was in Harlem; 130th st.

MN: And that was virtually all-black--and St Margaret's was mixed?

MC: Mixed. Very mixed.

MN: And what about the block, Kelly st., was it more mixed than the blocks in Harlem that you were living on?

MC: Oh certainly. It was--let's see, we had 1, 2, 3, 4, 5--maybe 6 black homeowners out of the entire block of Sissy Kelly. And the two corner buildings--

MN: Explain to Andrew and Princess why the term Sissy Kelly.

MC: I think it was Sissy Kelly because the other Kelley's were like--bad, I don't know.

MN: So this was a block that wound through the South Bronx and your block was mostly private houses?

MC: It was private houses, the other blocks were tenements.

MN: And the kids that grew up in the tenement blocks tended to be tougher?

MC: Oh yes, they used to beat us up. Really. They used to come to start fights with us and this was the time when there was--you know, everybody was having little social clubs. As a matter of fact, I remember my aunts in Harlem having a social club and I guess this was where we got the idea to do it and my girlfriends and I--there were five or six of us--we had a social club.

MN: What was the name of it?

MC: The Aces.

MN: The Aces. And did you found this when you were in junior high?

MC: Yes, we were in junior high/

MN: And what junior high were you going to?

MC: PS 60.

MN: And then you founded the Aces. Do you have any pictures of the Aces somewhere?

MC: I may, yes.

MN: Because this would be something we would want to have in our files. Did you have your own sweaters or outfits?

MC: The satin jackets that were so popular back that time--I guess they're still using them now.

But the satin jackets, yes.

MN: Were the Aces all people of Caribbean descent?

MC: No. There was two Jewish girls--no, three Jewish girls, two Jamaican girls, and myself--and one Spanish girl.

MN: So you were a little United Nations, the Aces. We've got to have pictures of the Aces.

What did the Aces have in common, or should I really ask?

MC: Well, we all went to school together. Some of them lived on my block, some didn't, and that about it.

MN: Did you throw parties? Were the Aces aware of boys at the time they became the Aces or was this--

MC: At the time they became the Aces? No. We were aware of boys, but only aware.

[Laughter] Only aware.

MN: So that was not a primary motivation?

MC: No.

MN: What were some of the things that the Aces did as a group?

MC: We used to go to 42nd st. on Sundays to church and spend the day there.

MN: You were part of this world which--of people from all different racial and ethnic backgrounds; did you perceive any tension in that environment when you moved to the Bronx? Was there tension surrounding the fact that Afro-Caribbean families were moving to the block?

MC: I can't say there were tensions--maybe in school. Maybe in school I felt the tensions. But I had issues in school that were--I had an uncle, his stage name was Leslie Scott but his real name was Zachariah Della and he played Porgy; "Porgy and Bess" on Broadway. This was Hassan and Ali's father, my cousins.

Andrew Tiedt: Could you spell that name for me? Could you tell me his stage name and his--

MC: His stage name was Leslie Scott--

AT: is that L-E-S-L-I--E?

MC: L-I-E. And that was his name, actually, until he became--

MN: When he converted to Islam?

MC: He converted to Islam. Excuse me, because I have the sniffles.

MN: Now, was he from your father's or mother's side?

MC: No, he was married to my mother's sister. Her younger sister.

MN: And was he Afro-American?

MC: He was Afro-American?

MN: Leslie Scott, and he was a lead in "Porgy and Bess" on Broadway?

MC: Yes, on Broadway and he traveled to--he was with the cast that went to Russia with "Porgy and Bess"

MN: How did this influence your experience in school, as you were saying?

MC: Well, we called him Uncle "Curly" because he had curly hair. And Uncle Curly used to help me with my homework, and he used to read my history books and then he would educate me with stuff that was other than what was in my history books. And he would make me go to school and ask questions that my teachers really didn't want to answer.

MN: Really? So this was about African-American history, primarily?

MC: Yes. It was about Afro-American history, it was about world history--the King of Saudi Arabia was black and it was not in my history book that he was black. And things like that--my uncle kept picking things out of my history books and telling me "go question this, go question that", and I got into a lot of trouble.

MN: Did he have a background in the Marcus Garvey movement?

MC: No.

MN: Was he involved in any other organizations?

MC: None that I know of. It was just this--

MN: Where did he live?

MC: He lived in the Bronx. He lived in the same house with us for a while until they bought their house in St. Alban's.

MN: So he lived--what was the address of your family house?

MC: 754 Kelly st.

MN: And it's still standing?

MC: It's still standing. It was burned down and rebuilt as far as I know.

MN: Wow. So you were a good student throughout school in terms of--were you in the one or two classes?

MC: No. I was an average student, I think.

MN: But you came to school prepped to raise questions, which the teachers didn't want to hear?

MC: Oh yes. Yes.

MN: Let me ask a question: if you were in the one or two classes, would the teachers have been more receptive to that?

MC: No, no.

MN: Or it was just they really--

MC: It wasn't allowed.

MN: --they didn't want to hear it?

MC: They didn't want to hear it. They didn't want the books questioned; they didn't want to have to answer questions. At one point, my uncle was very persistent and he sent a note asking my teacher to answer certain questions, and she sent back a note saying "I would be glad to talk to

you face-to-face, but I will not answer those questions on paper." And it was about some of my history studies.

MN: Was this the major manifestation of racial tensions that you remember from school, or did it also spill over into the kids.

MC: No, I don't think it did. I don't think it did.

MN: Was this in junior high when these issues came up or more in Morris?

MC: It was in junior high. I also in one of my junior high school classes, I had a teacher actually make a very bad remark, which nobody did anything about. She was out and out prejudiced.

MN: What did she say? Do you remember the exact language?

MC: Yes. Her name was Mrs. Segal and she said--some girl in my class who I will not name. I don't know where she is today, but she was acting out, she was a black girl. And Mrs. Segal made the remark "Lincoln shouldn't have freed the niggers because they didn't deserve it anyway". And I was devastated. I went home and--

MN: This was in junior high school?

MC: This was in junior high school, PS 60.

MN: Wow.

MC: So those things did exist at that time, they definitely existed.

MN: Did you feel that the teachers in the school didn't respect the black students and didn't push them? Or was the prejudice more a matter of--did it spill over into the education? As opposed to insulting remarks?

MC: I think it spilled over into the education and I think that the black students were, you know, trapped, into the general courses, no one was encouraged to take an academic course--nobody. It was, you know, take a sewing class, learn how to make aprons, take a home cooking class--but

nobody was pushed into math and science or anything like that.

MN: Were there any teachers who encouraged you? Who sought you out and really encouraged you academically or intellectually that you can think of?

MC: No. I think maybe in elementary school.

MN: But not in junior high?

MC: Or maybe it was in junior high, I'm not really sure. It was one teacher, her name is Golpar, who constantly pushed me to write and write poetry and English--that was the only person, I think. I couldn't do what I wanted to do in school. Thus, I don't want to make excuses, but that's probably why I was a lousy student.

MN: Now, when you say you wanted to do, it would have been more in the area of history?

MC: No, I wanted to be an artist; it was my heart. And until today, I'm an artist in any respect. But my grandfather wouldn't hear of it; it was not for a girl. You could be one of three things if you were a girl: a wife and mother, a nurse, or a secretary. That was the criteria for girls having an education at all, in my family.

MN: Now, I want to move back to the whole question of street atmosphere. What was Kelly st.-- was there an active outdoor life in the streets on Kelly st., on the block that you were a part of?

MC: My stoop was the hangout stoop. And everybody came and sat on my stoop everyday after school or every evening or whatever and we did whatever. We took pictures, we hung out, we played games on the street.

MN: Did girls and boys play different games in the street? Or not on your block--but there was a clear division of what boys did and what girls did on the street?

MC: No. No, not really.

MN: So you played stickball?

MC: I played stickball everyday

MN: Punchball?

MC: Punchball, Dodgeball--

MN: Did you play Ringalevio?

MC: Ringalevio, yes.

MN: Capture the Flag?

MC: No, didn't do that, don't know what it is. [Laughter]

MN: Now, what about Johnny and the Pony? Was that only the boys in the schoolyard?

MC: That was only the boys.

MN: I have to explain to them what Johnny and the Pony was. Was there music in the streets?

Could you hear--was this something that you were exposed to fairly early?

MC: Streets? No, we had a candy store around the corner that had a jukebox that we used to go and play all the time. We used to hang out in the candy store.

MN: Wow. What corner was the candy store on?

MC: It was on the corner of Longwood Avenue and Kelly st.

MN: Longwood and Kelly. Do you remember the name of the candy store?

MC: No.

MN: How old were you when you started going to hang out and listen to the jukebox?

MC: Junior high schoolish.

[BREAK IN TAPE]

MN: OK, we're going to resume now after having lunch. Now, I wanted to ask you: you went, through one of your friends, to a Jewish summer camp when you were living in the Bronx.

Could you describe that experience and how you got to go there and what it was like going

there?

MC: OK. My block was largely Jewish when we bought the house. I had tenants who lived in my house at a private house who were Jewish. One family on the top floor--the father was a rabbi and I used to go up and turn off their lights on Fridays and do things for them that they were not allowed to do because of their religion, and their daughter and I became very good friends. The two corner buildings--the block was all private houses, Sissy Kelly--but the two corner houses are apartment buildings and those two buildings were largely Jewish families. And the Yentas used to sit out everyday with the chairs--they used to bring their own chairs to the courtyard and sit out everyday and complain about us kids. [Laughter] Anyway, around the corner, on the corner of Becks st. and 156th, was a community center and right next to it was a private house that also served as a yeshiva where Jewish boys used to go to study to do their bar mitzvah. And the community house was called the juvenile house and my girlfriends and I'd go along there and one year everybody was getting ready to go away to a summer camp and my parents said "Sure, you can go." And they paid for it and I went away to a summer camp where I was the only black child in the camp. It was a Jewish summer camp.

MN: All girls?

MC: All girls. All girls. And it was a really wonderful experience. I learned a great deal there. I had one counselor, whose name was Bunny, who lived on Tibbetts Avenue in the Bronx who was really a special person. She encouraged me with writing and stuff like that. And I learned a lot of Jewish tradition and things like that.

MN: Did you grow up eating Jewish food along with Caribbean food in that neighborhood?

MC: One of my favorite foods is kishka.

MN: Oh you--I love kishka!

MC: I love kishka.

MN: Kishka is--we used to call them stuffed derma. It's cow's intestines stuffed with a delicious mixture of some sort of grains and spices, probably in chicken fat to give it the extra kick. Did you eat gefilte fish?

MC: Oh sure.

MN: I'll describe to them later. And were there any Jewish appetizer stores in your area where you could get halva or smoked fish. Is that something you remember?

MC: Yes, sure. My block was very mixed. We had Italian families, we had Jewish families, we had Caribbean families, and I guess just, you know, white families; I don't really know where they came from, what part of the world they came from.

MN: Right. Now, how long did it remain mixed? When did you begin noticing that--you know, you came there in '45--when did you notice that it was becoming predominantly black and Latino? How long did that--was that a gradual transition or did it happen all of a sudden?

MC: No, maybe in the late fifties, early sixties it started to change.

MN: When did you start becoming aware of the popular music of the time and how important was that to you as an adolescent?

MC: I guess as a teenager, going around the corner to the candy store and the jukebox.

MN: Now, what were the songs you recall hearing on the jukebox? This would have been when you were 14 or 15?

MC: Yes, around that time.

MN: So in the late forties, early fifties. Any songs that stand out at you of songs that you remember from that jukebox?

MC: Not really. By name? Oh, gosh, I can't remember them.

MN: By type, were they mostly--

MC: One song I remember that I learned the entire song in Spanish.

AT: Can you sing it?

MN: Can you sing it for us?

MC: No. [Laughter] The name of it was "Que me falta?" and it was sang by Graciela, Machito's sister.

MN: Oh, wow. Was this candy store a Spanish-owned candy store?

MC: Yes.

MN: So this was a Spanish-owned candy store and on the jukebox was it mostly Latin music?

MC: A lot of Latin music, yes.

MN: Did they have any bird groups also, like the Orioles, the Ravens--the Rhythm and Blues or was it mostly Latin music?

MC: I think it was mostly Latin music.

MN: OK. Now, here you are, you're living on a block which is close to majority Jewish or majority white, you're from an Afro-Caribbean family growing up on Calypso, and you're going to a candy store listening to a jukebox with mostly Latin music.

MC: Mostly Latin music.

MN: Was that the music that captured the imagination of people at that time? Or do you think--

MC: Yes. Yes, because the Aces--three or four out of six girls were Jewish, but we all went to the Spanish dances.

MN: And when did you start going to Spanish dances in the neighborhood?

MC: I guess around junior high, early high school.

MN: And where were the venues for these Spanish dances?

[BREAK IN TAPE]

MN: When we were beginning we were talking about where you went to dance to Latin music or to hear it live. Were there live music venues in the neighborhood by the time you were going to the candy store?

MC: Maybe a few years later. I don't know that I was old enough to go dancing at the time that I went to the candy store. I wasn't allowed to go out socially dancing.

MN: When was the first time you remember going to a club or concert in the Bronx to hear live music? Was this when you were in high school?

MC: Maybe in high school, early high school. And it was probably not Hunt's Point Palace, which was very popular--but I did go to Hunt's Point Palace--but there was a place we used to go to also called the Royal Manor.

MN: Royal Mansion?

MC: Royal Manor. I think it was the Royal Manor and it was on Boston Rd.

MN: OK, I know where that is.

MC: Royal Mansion?

MN: Royal Mansion, about 169th st.

MC: So we used to go there dancing. And Hunt's Point Palace, so those two places.

MN: Do you have a recollection of when you heard your first Latin record? Was this in somebody's house?

MC: No, it was more than likely at the candy store. [Laughter]

MN: OK, so what attracted you to that candy store in the first place?

MC: It was a place to congregate with your friends after school.

MN: Did you eat, or what items did you purchase at the candy store when you were hanging out?

Or did he let you hang out without purchasing things?

MC: No, I guess soda or things like that. We didn't eat much because there were ice cream shops. There were real ice cream shops when we were young.

MN: Do you remember the name of the candy store?

MC: No.

MN: But it was run by a Spanish family.

MC: Right.

MN: By the time you were going to high school were there more Puerto Rican families on the block or were they more in the surrounding area?

MC: No, not on the block you're right. In the surrounding area. Sissy Kelly pretty much stayed the same.

MN: So Sissy Kelly remained mostly Caribbean families and white families but the tenement blocks attracted a lot of Puerto Rican families?

MC: Right. I think Sissy Kelly changed when the Jewish families started moving out of the two corner apartment buildings and then we got Latin families moving into that block.

MN: Tell us a little bit about the other Caribbean families on the block on Sissy Kelly and your friendships or knowledge of them.

MC: There was a family, the Patrick family, that lived up the block from me.

MN: And what island were they from?

MC: I'm not sure.

MN: And they were--almost everybody who was on that block was from an island?

MC: Was from an island, yes. There were the Williams family, who lived diagonally across the street from me--Edith Williams and her brother, her mother and father. There was the

Braithwaite family who you know a great deal of. The three boys: Ronny, Johnny and Cecil. And the Hinksons, who had a very large family--what other families? That's pretty much the Caribbean families on the block. All of us went to, I guess, St. Margaret's and we got involved in St. Margaret's. St. Margaret's was really a community kind of church, after a point. When we first moved there, there was a priest named Father Krieger--

MN: Could you spell that for us? Would it be K-R-I-E-G-E-R?

MC: Yes, and at that time the involvement in the church was different; we had a lot of community things going on in the church, little theater groups--but that was, I think, in the later years. That was in the fifties, the late fifties. We had a little theatre group--mid fifties--in the church.

MN: Were you involved in the theater?

MC: Yes, of course.

MN: And were you acting, singing, writing plays?

MC: I was primarily behind the scenes. I was a little bit older than most of the kids in the group at that time and I was primarily behind the scenes, but I also did do some acting--reluctantly. One of my stars lost her voice on opening night of *The King and I* and I played Anna, which was a catastrophe, [Laughter] but nevertheless we did it and it was fun. We did Chekhov; we did *Swan Song* with a very young who pulled it off wonderfully. As a matter of fact, he went on to do a lot of theater work on his own, his name is Henry Miller.

MN: We've interviewed him. I was about to ask if you knew him.

MC: Bumpy? I introduced Bumpy to the arts.

MN: Really?

MC: Bumpy was one of my protégés, yes. I went to see Bumpy maybe two years ago in

Manhattan at one of his plays.

MN: Yes, I'll have to email him. We play tennis together sometimes--

MC: Really?

MN: --in Crotona Park.

MC: He just moved about a year ago, he and his wife, from Trinity Place.

MN: Right. They were down in the Woodstock Terrace and they moved, I think, up to Yonkers.

MC: Right. And I got a card from them that they moved. Bumpy was under my wing, God bless him.

MN: Where did you run into Bumpy? At the Church?

MC: At the Church, yes. And Bumpy was one of our prize actors. He was the King in *The King and I* and then he played *Swan Song*. We did a lot of take-offs of Broadway plays. I can't even think of all of them, but we did a lot of things that we stole from Broadway.

MN: So you did--there was a lot of musicals. Now, who played the piano during the musicals? Did you have--

MC: No. I think we had taped music.

MN: So this church was a big part of your life. Now, there's a very well-known person who was part of this church at the time named Colin Powell, what were your recollections of Mr. Powell?

MC: None.

MN: None?

MC: None. None whatsoever. I just know he was there.

MN: What about Gene Norman, who was also somebody who was from that block on Kelly st., was he somebody who you knew?

MC: No.

MN: When did you--when it came time to go to high school out of P.S. 60, how did you end up going to Morris and what was the reputation of Morris?

MC: I think everyone went to Morris. Everyone from that neighborhood went to Morris.

MN: It was the neighborhood school.

MC: It was the--I think Morris may have been the only academic school you could go to. I know Monroe was not in our district. Monroe was supposed to be a much better school at the time, but we were not allowed to go to Monroe. We were all shuffled up to Morris.

MN: Now, Morris did not have a good reputation at the time?

MC: Not as good as Monroe, I do remember that.

MN: And when you got to Morris, what was it like? Describe your feelings the first time you stepped in the building. Were you excited? Intimidated?

MC: Maybe intimidated. Maybe intimidated. But other than that, no--I just--I liked the boys [laughter] high school boys.

MN: OK. Now, there's a certain point--when you started The Aces you weren't interested in boys. When is the threshold when you become interested in boys?

MC: I don't know. I think maybe it was like the senior year of junior high school. The boys used to wait outside the school for the girls to get out.

MN: So they were interested in you and you were interested in them.

MC: At that point, yes. And then high school was different. High school--I think everybody is a bit more mature and I think in high school the girls even started looking at college boys and not high school boys.

MN: Now, when people started thinking about boys or girls pairing off, did people divide along racial lines at that point? Or was that also--were those times also--

MC: It definitely--in some cases it divided along racial lines. The four girls that were in The Aces with me that were Jewish, the three or four girls, they all married Jewish guys and moved on to different neighborhoods. I kept contact with them for many years, but we did not socialize together after sleeping in each others beds for years, we just went separate ways socially. There was contact but no social interaction.

MN: Now, when this split began, which way did the Puerto Ricans--did the Puerto Ricans tend to become part of the black crowd or the blacks become part of the Puerto Rican crowd or was it--were they a bridge groups that went sort of both ways; some Puerto Ricans would hang out with whites, some with blacks?

MC: I think it went both ways. I think the Puerto Ricans hung out mostly with blacks, they did not go white. They went mostly to the blacks.

MN: Did you actually start formal dating in junior high school or it was--

MC: It may have been high school--it may have been early high school.

MN: Now, if you were dating did the boy have to come to the house to meet your grandparents?

MC: They should have.

MN: But you got around it?

MC: They should have. [Laughs] That was the rule, but it wasn't always followed, of course not. There was a little restaurant on the corner of Southern Blvd. and Longwood Ave. that had tables and chairs and we would go there for coffee or tea or whatever and spend hours sitting in the chair having a cup of coffee or tea and socializing with the guys that maybe we couldn't bring home.

MN: What kind of guys were you attracted to? Was it a particular that, at the time--were you attracted to the--

MC: No, I think my attraction to guys was more rebellious than anything else, because my grandfather was so rigid. As long as it wasn't a West Indian guy--I just couldn't deal with that because that's exactly what my grandfather wanted.

MN: So your rebellion--you gravitated towards which groups?

MC: Latins. Latin guys. Italian guys, Latin guys, anybody but West Indian guys.

MN: How did the cool Latin and Italian guys--because I assume those were the only ones you would--how did they dress?

MC: I think most of them were in the service at the time, in the Korean War.

MN: Really? So you were seeing older guys? Or they took them in at 16, 17?

MC: Yes. When was the Korean War?

MN: '51 it started.

MC: '51, OK.

MN: So you'd be 16 then and you'd be going into high school, you'd be a sophomore in high school. And they'd be in the service at 16 to 17?

MC: They were in the service, sure.

MN: That's right. Arthur Crier went into the Marines at 17.

AT: So, at that point, you wouldn't have to lie about that? You didn't have to be 18 to enter in the service?

MN: I don't know. We'll have to check on that.

MC: I don't know. Maybe with your parents permission you could go in early or something.

MN: Did these guys come to the neighborhood in their uniforms.

MC: Sure.

MN: And so that was kind of hot.

MC: That was hot, sure.

MN: So these were not guys who were standing around with ducktail haircuts?

MC: No, these were--

MN: Kind of men.

MC: Yes.

MN: OK. And they were anything but West Indian.

MC: Yes.

MN: Anything but proper West Indian, upwardly mobile, good student, kind of boys.

MC: Right. There was one West Indian kid that was really--and to today I don't think I was really nice to him, but he was a nice guy. [Laughter] And his name was Johnny Box. He was-- I'm sure he must be...I guess he was in the order of Colin Powell, that kind of look, that kind of demeanor.

MN: Kind of tall and kind of upright and not sort of the swinging hipster kind of guy.

MC: Right. And Johnny was crazy about me and I was crazy about this guy named Raphael Guzman.

MN: Ooh! [Laughter] Alright! So describe Guzman.

MC: He probably wasn't as tall as me. [Laughter]

MN: See that's the thing: you're kind of tall and Italian and Latin guys in those days tended to be short.

MC: Yes, he probably wasn't as tall as me. And he was a paratrooper.

MN: Ooh!

MC: And that was exciting.

MN: Jumping out of airplanes, landing behind enemy lines with a parachute. And was he a good

dancer?

MC: He was a good dancer.

MN: Did--

MC: I never brought him home, no.

MN: Raphael Guzman--so was being a good dancer part of your criteria at that point?

MC: Yes. Oh, I think, yes. All the girls. Dancing was very important, music and dancing.

MN: Did you ever go to the Palladium?

MC: Yes.

MN: What was that like, to go to the Palladium back in the day?

MC: Exciting.

PO: Where was the palladium?

MN: It was on 52nd st.--

MC: Downtown.

MN: In downtown Manhattan. It was the best spot for Latin music in the city. And did you get to dance to the best of the bands like Machito and Tito Puente and--

MC: Tito Rodriguez.

MN: Any stories about being there when they were playing live? Anything that leaps out at you?

MC: Nothing exceptional, only that it was the place to be, all the girls, all the guys.

MN: And what were some of the--you know, when you were at Morris--what were some of the places in the Bronx you went dancing? Did you dance at the Hunt's Point Palace?

MC: Hunt's Point Palace and the Royal Mansion.

MN: How big was the dance floor at Hunt's Point Palace? How many people could fit in there?

MC: I don't know, I don't remember, I haven't the faintest.

MN: Royal Mansion and --were these big venues or medium size?

MC: I'd say they were big. At the time I thought they were big, I don't know if I walked in there now what I'd think of them.

MN: Did you ever go to the Tropicana Club on Westchester Ave.?

MC: No.

MN: OK. So it was Hunts Point Palace and Royal Mansion were your spots.

MC: For dancing, yes.

MN: And so what did your parents, I mean your grandfather make of you—did he know you were kind of going out behind his back, did he have spies?

MC: No, no.

MN: So you had a secret life?

MC: I had a secret life.

MN: So in the house you were the proper West Indian girl and outside the house--

MC: I was having fun. [Laughter] I was having big fun.

MN: Right. OK, now, was there any point where you saw with these guys bad things happen or the drugs coming in, or was that later?

MC: That may have been in the late fifties.

MN: Right, but the early fifties in your crowd there were no drugs.

MC: No drugs, no.

MN: Well that's--and there were none on your block?

MC: No, I don't think there were ever any on my block.

MN: OK. So drugs never hit Sissy Kelly.

MC: No.

MN: OK. Now, what about gangs? Was that something you were aware of or it wasn't a big deal?

MC: It was something we were aware of, but we never really got involved with guys that were in gangs, and if we did we just--we sort of, like, maybe saw the guy outside of his gang but never really got involved with him and his gang. The gangs used to hang out mostly in the school yards.

MN: Did they have jackets, the gangs? Or did they have outfits, distinctive outfits, in your area?

MC: Not that I remember.

MN: Were the gangs mostly divided by neighborhood or racial-ethnic lines?

MC: I think neighborhood.

MN: When you were at Morris, were you in the academic track of the commercial track?

MC: When I was at Morris I was probably in the commercial track. I never finished Morris, I later got a GED. I took as many art courses as Morris had to give and when they ran out of art courses, I ran out of interest.

MN: What was Morris--did you enjoy your experience at the school or was the art the only thing holding you there?

MC: Well, what was holding me there was my grandfather, OK. But the art was the only interest that I had there.

MN: Were you looking to just drop out and go to work?

MC: Yes.

MN: Or drop out and get married?

MC: No. Drop out and go to work. Actually, I wanted to go to SIA, the School of Industrial Arts, and my grandfather wouldn't let me take the test. But he let my cousin take the test who

was a boy, one year younger than me, who had no talent for art whatsoever, but because he was a boy he could go into a different kind of career.

MN: So you felt your gender was definitely standing in the way--and your race--were definitely standing in the way of your talent reaching its potential?

MC: Oh, sure.

MN: Of those two, which do you think were more important, race or gender? Or--in terms of keeping you back?

MC: Well, when you think of family relationships, it would have to be gender because I came from a very old-fashioned--and at this time, you have to realize, my parents weren't raising us. I was a generation beyond that, my grandparents were raising me, so it wasn't even negotiable.

MN: OK. Now, when you us, were any of your other siblings in that house, or it was just you?

MC: No, it was just me. My other siblings had move on to other things. They were all older than me.

MN: Right. Was there a lot of tension in the house at this time, when you were in high school, that was overt and visible? Were you showing your grandfather through passive-aggressive behavior that you were fed up with--

MC: Oh, I'm sure. I was a horrible child. [Laughter]

MN: Was it, like, more overt than passive?

MC: Yes.

MN: Where you throw things--

MC: No. Oh, gosh, you're kidding. [Laughter]

MN: It was more just not coming home.

MC: Yes, just not doing what I was supposed to do.

MN: And did you have--you know, in the course of your life, you've accomplished a tremendous amount. Did you have any sense inside you that you had all this talent and all this ability and it was being stifled, or it was not that conscious at that time?

MC: It was not that conscious. And it was not that conscious because, I would say ignorance, really. I would say ignorance.

MN: When did you drop--so when did you actually drop out of Morris and what was the reason for you dropping out?

MC: I turned the age of consent for dropping out--I guess 16, I may have been in my junior year, and I did drop out. I got working papers at the time, and I remember my mother saying "oh, good. Now you get go to work and bring some money into the house."

MN: This was your mother?

MC: Yes.

MN: But not your grandmother?

MC: My mother. At this time my mother had moved into the house with my grandparents, yes.

MN: So this was--she was bartending at the time?

MC: Yes.

MN: In Harlem, mostly?

MC: Yes.

MN: Wow. Your grandparents must have been really thrilled.

MC: Well, they were really old, I guess, at this time. By this time, they were pretty--

MN: And so your mother was OK wit you dropping out and going to work?

MC: Yes. Education was not a thing with my mother.

MN: It wasn't a priority with your mother.

MC: Yes.

MN: What about your siblings? Did they get education?

MC: No. No, not at all.

AT: Can I ask, where were all your siblings at this point? Were they in New York still or did they move on to other places?

MC: My sister was in New York, one of my brothers was in the Air Force, and the other brother was--he went south for a little while and then he came back to New York. And they bounced back and forth, I guess, between my parents for a while.

MN: So this time in you life--when you were 16--and where did you end up going to work?

MC: Well, I thought I was an artist and I went looking for a job as an artist, and I went to this-- there was a factory in Lower Manhattan and they advertised for an artist in the newspaper and I went and answered the ad and said "oh, I'm an artist", and the guy said "OK", and he took me into this room, it was a long, long room. Very dark, it was like in a movie, that light that hung from the string with the thing over it, over these tables, long tables like this. And he says 'here, I'll show you what to do.' And he took me to the end of the table and he showed me how to put the paint on the end of the brush and all of those hurricane lamps you see with the roses on them? I was painting hurricane lamps. [Laughs]

MN: when you got this job, did the person who hired you see you as black or did it matter?

MC: I don't think it mattered, and I don't know that very many people that I was employed by saw me as black. The reality is I'm not obviously black, so unless they asked--

MN: Right. So they just said "OK. Here's a person and she seems to be able to do what we want her to do."

MC: Right. And then I got another job screwing screws into the frames of eyeglasses. [Laughs]

And then I got another job on Christopher st. printing names on pencils. [Laughs] I had lots of jobs and eventually, I think, I got a job and I was not happy with the job and I went to the employer and I said "Look, I can't do this, give me something else. I want to work in the office; I don't want to be back here." I think it was a scarf factory, and the guy said "Well, you can't work in the office if you don't have a high school diploma." And that's when I called the state or the city and I found out that they were giving the equivalency exam and it was at Roosevelt High School on Fordham Rd. that Saturday morning. And prepared with number two pencils, I went and I took the exam and I walked away and they mailed me my scorecard and they mailed me a little diploma. And so that was the beginning of me having a high school diploma.

MN: And what year was this? Was this in the late '50s?

MC: this was in the '50s.

MN: Your name growing up was Marilyn Guy?

MC: No, Orr--My maiden name is Orr.

MN: O-R-R? That was your father's name?

MC: That was my father's name?

MN: And you now go under the name Marilyn Cruz, was that your first husband's name?

MC: That was my second husband's name.

MN: Second husband. And you've been married three times?

MC: Twice.

MN: Twice, OK. How old were you when you got married for the first time?

MC: Nineteen.

MN: And he was Latino?

MC: No. He was Greek.

MN: And he was from the neighborhood?

MC: No, he was from Greece.

MN: He was from Greece? Wow.

MC: I met a dancer on Boston Rd. and she and I became very good friends--

MN: A dancer at one of the clubs?

MC: Yes. I don't remember her name.

MN: Now, when you say a dancer, is this an exotic dancer?

MC: Yes, she was an exotic dancer, and she and I became good friends and she was going out with this Greek guy, and he was a very rich guy and a very whatever--and he wanted to bring his nephew to this country and his nephew came and she said "He wants to stay here, he wants to get married." And I said "OK." Everybody else in my crowd was already married. I was the only one that was still out there, so I got married. Didn't last very long.

MN: How long--you married him without actually having met him?

MC: Oh, no, I met him. I knew him, sure. He was here.

MN: Which of the clubs on Boston Rd. had exotic dancers?

MC: No, she did not work on Boston Rd.

MN: Oh, you met her on Boston Rd--

MC: At a club.

MN: Do you remember which club?

MC: Probably Freddy's

MN: OK. So by the time you were nineteen you were hanging out at bars on Fordham Rd.?

MC: Yes.

MN: I mean on Boston Rd.?

MC: Somewhere between high school and adulthood my social life changed. I started going back to Harlem and I started going back to the clubs in Harlem like the Red Rooster, The Brasserie, Bell Book and Candle, The palm Cafe--places like that became my social life. It was a different life than the Latin social life. It was completely different; I don't even know how to compare them.

MN: Right. So when you were younger, your social life was mostly with Latinos and then when you went to Harlem it was mostly black?

MC: And Boston Rd.--

MN: Was mostly black?

MC:--was also black.

MN: So, Freddy's then was--

MC: Freddy's was a black bar.

MN: --was a black venue. So this woman--this exotic dancer that you met--was she black?

MC: Yes.

MN: And she had a Greek boyfriend and his nephew--

MC: I don't want to get into my marriages. [Laughs] That's not the history of the Bronx.

[Laughs]

MN: What was Freddy's like? Can you describe what Freddy's looked like inside? Was this your favorite spot?

MC: It was a long bar--I had a horrible experience at Freddy's once--but it was a long bar fro the street. And then there was a back room with tables and you could sit in the back or you could hang out at the bar.

MN: Did they have live music?

MC: Yes, I think so.

MN: But that was not the main attraction?

MC: No, it was just the place to be--the people.

MN: Was it a classy place, would you say?

MC: Yes, it was considered upper--yes.

MN: And the people were relatively classy?

MC: Yes.

MN: OK. Now, what was your horrible experience at Freddy's, if you want to--?

MC: At Freddy's? I was mistaken for someone else and I was almost beaten up--it was bizarre.

MN: Did you ever go to Sylvia's Blue Morocco?

MC: Across the street? Yes, sure.

MN: And what was that like?

MC: Different. It was big fun, but it was different than Freddy's because it wasn't as sophisticated a crowd as Freddy's was.

MN: Do you remember any of the music that you saw at Sylvia's?

MC: That was the Platters' time.

MN: It was more Rhythm and Blues?

MC: More Rhythm and Blues.

MN: So Freddy's was a little bit more upscale?

MC: Yes.

MN: OK. Did you ever go to Goodson's?

MC: No.

MN: OK. So it was Freddy's and the Blue Morocco. Did you ever go to Club 845?

MC: Yes.

MN: OK. What was that like?

MC: That was, I think, the beginning of what you may have now as the strippers, but it was Go-Go girls then.

MN: And this was in the '50s?

MC: Yes.

MN: And they had Go-Go girls?

MC: Oh they had Go-Go- girls.

MN: And what ere the Go-Go- girls doing?

MC: Up on the bar dancing.

MN: Up on the bar dancing.

MC: Up on the bar dancing in very scantily-garbed outfits--whatever--I even think I even thought about being a Go-Go girl at some time. My brother was a bouncer in that bar when they had the Go-Go- girls there.

MN: What was his name?

MC: Carlton.

MN: Carlton.

MC: And the barmaid was Peggy, and she was the best-known barmaid around.

MN: Peggy was the best-known barmaid In the Bronx?

MC: Yes.

MN: What made her that well-known?

MC: I don't know. I don't know, but she was. Everyone flocked.

MN: Did she have a lot of personality?

MC: Yes.

MN: Was she attractive?

MC: Very.

MN: Was this also a predominately African-American crowd or mixed crowd?

MC: No, predominately African-American at the 845. Yes.

MN: Were the Go-Go girls have a sort of body type/skin color type--were they more light-skinned or did they vary in complexion?

MC: No, they varied.

MN: And how many Go-Go girls would be dancing on the bar at once, would you say, at any one time?

MC: Maybe three.

MN: And this was in the middle '50s or the late '50s when you first--It must have been in the late '50s'.

MC: late '50s, early '60s.

MN: Was there live music there at that time?

MC: At the 845, yes.

MN: Do you remember any particular groups?

MC: No. By names? No.

AT: Would the Go-Go girls dance to musical accompaniment? They would just dance to background music or would they dance? I'm trying to imagine the scene, you know. [Laughter]

MN: Yes. Andrew and I plan to go--some time travel.

MC: They were just dancing, they were also dancing.

AT: So they were just paid to hang out and dance and talk to the customers?

MN: Did a lot of guys go there just for the Go-Go dancers?

MC: Oh, sure. Of course.

MN: So that was one of the major attractions?

MC: That was the place to go for guys. [Laughs] You knew where they were.

MN: Oh, so if you wanted to meet guys you'd go to 845 because they were there to see the Go-Go dancers. Was that considered by respectable families--845--a little risqué because of that?

MC: I wouldn't say that. I don't think respectable families even had any idea what was going on inside the 845 or whatever. You just, you know, "I'm going to the club."

MN: Now, Freddy's didn't have Go-Go dancers or anything like that.

MC: No.

MN: It was much more classy kind of place? Low key?

MC: Yes.

MN: What about Sylvia's Blue Morocco, did they have--?

MC: No dancers, no. But they weren't as low key as Freddy's.

MN: And the Royal Mansion was mainly Latin music?

MC: Yes.

MN: Did you ever go up to the Boston Rd. Ballroom?

MC: No.

MN: Princess, do you have any question you want to ask?

Princess Okieme: Actually, no. She's just answered everything. I don't have any questions.

MN: Andrew anything out of this?

AT: I'm just curious about the music also. You don't remember the shows you saw at 845, you don't remember any of the bands or the musicians that played there?

MC: No. No, they weren't known, known bands at the time.

AT: But they might have been local acts that were--

MC: Yes.

MN: Did you know any musicians personally from the neighborhood or any people who were performing artists or musicians?

MC: No. From the neighborhood? No.

PO: Oh, I have a question: because you got your GED was it hard for you to do your schoolwork when you came to Fordham? Was it really challenging because you didn't complete high school?

MC: No. Not really, no. I found it's different when you go to school when you're older. I came to Fordham after my husband died and my doctor suggested I find myself.

MN: Was this your first husband?

MC: This was my second husband. Mr. Cruz.

MN: OK, we don't want to talk about--

MC: No, it's OK, he died quite young. He had a heart attack.

MN: When did you marry Mr. Cruz?

MC: In 1968. 1968.

MN: Did marrying somebody named Cruz reflect the fact that you were now more in Latino cultural milieu again, or was it more luck of the draw?

MC: No, because I guess by that time at that stage of your life you're more family-oriented than anything else. Although we used to go out, we used to go out a lot. Friday night was our night out and we would go dancing at the Latin places. One was on the corner of Grand Concourse and 161st st.--it was a dancehall.

MN: The Savoy Manor or something?

MC: There was a dancehall that we used to go to regularly.

MN: The Savoy Ballroom, maybe? And this was in the '60s?

MC: And that was Latin.

MN: And that was a Latin venue.

MC: And my husband and I used to go there frequently, and it was that and house parties and things like that.

MN: We're going to wind this portion up.

MC: OK, but let me answer her question. I didn't go to Fordham until I was 35--or no, even older, maybe I was 39. And it's funny how I got to Fordham, because I really went to apply at NYU and in the application they told me I had to bring my GED scores so that they could place me in, you know, one of those classes that prepares you for college. And when I brought them my GED scores, they said I didn't need to take any of the courses--my scores were extremely high--which I never knew what they meant, they were just numbers on a piece of paper. And they said instead of going to NYU, Fordham has a lot of money for programs--I think of it as BEOG or whatever. The counselor at NYU said "why don't you--I'm going to send you up to see"--Claude had nothing to do with it, actually. She said "I'm going to send you up to Fordham to speak with someone there." And I came here and I brought my scores and everything and they said "you're in" right away, and I didn't have to take any remedial courses or anything and I majored in psychology under Margo Naidian. [Laughs] I don't know if she's still around, but--

MN: When you were going through this whole wild phase or rebellious phase--

MC: My youth?

MN: Your youth, however long that lasted. [Laughter] Some of us, it never ends. But were you

still close to other people in your family--cousins? Or were you keeping them at arm's length when you were going to the clubs and the dances?

MC: Pretty much keeping them at arm's length, and I would think--I was older than the cousins, than most of my cousins.

MN: Were you in the family--did you have the reputation as the wild one?

MC: Yes.

MN: OK. So it was pretty well-known that--

MC: Not wild but, you know, just--

MN: Different?

MC: Different. I wasn't wild. I just--I was a non-conformist and they were all conformists.

MN: Did you have any point where you had a political or intellectual awakening--how did--were you affected by the '60s and the Civil Rights movement and the protest movements of that period? Is that something that had an influence on you in that period?

MC: No more than everyone else, I think. By that time, I was a mother and I was busy raising my kids. I was conscious of everything that was going on.

MN: When did you have children, in what years?

MC: '56 and '58 and then, from my second marriage, I had a third son in 1971.

MN: So your first child, you were 16 when--

MC: No, 20.

MN: Oh, OK. 20 and 22. My math was wrong. And that was--where were you living with your children, on Kelly st.?

MC: On Kelly st. For a short time when I first got married, I moved down to Bryant Avenue, which was on the other side of Bruckner Boulevard.

MN: Your children are both sons?

MC: Yes, all of my children are sons.

MN: Did they go to public schools in the area?

MC: Well, yes. They went to public school around the corner from Kelly st. I think it was 130, and when it was time for my eldest son to go to junior high school, he was going to go to PS 52, and that was when I moved out of my family's home on Kelly st. and it was--I told my mother I--they had passed out a thing that PS 52 was on lockdown, literally. The children went in at eight--It was a block away and they used to go home for lunch everyday, all their lives. And when it was time for Craig to go into junior high school, they said that 52--he would not be allowed; the school is locked at nine o'clock in the morning and it's opened up again at three o'clock. And I said to my mom "I don't want to live here."

MN: I want, at this time, to kind of close it down because when we talk about the scary and dangerous times at Hunts Point that's a whole other subject. But I want to thank you for this amazing Interview. Are there any wind-up questions that you have about the things we've talked about thus far and then we'll leave you for a final summation. Princess?

PO: No, I don't have any.

MN: Andrew?

AT: We can leave it here.

MN: OK. Do you have anything, just In conclusion, you want to say about the material that we've covered thus far?

MC: Not really. I think my whole experience is pretty much average for that time, for girls who came from families that were pretty controlling at the time. And the other girls used to come and beat us up all the time. [Laughs] That's all. The girls on Longwood Avenue and the girls on the

other Kelly streets used to come look for us to beat us up.

MN: You didn't mention this before. When did you start noticing that girls from other blocks were coming to beat you up?

MC: I guess when we got to junior high school. When we got to junior high school, girls formed cliques, and you just didn't fit into certain cliques. I was beat up for lots of reasons; I was either not black enough or not white enough or whatever the reason, the black girls used to beat me up, the white girls used to beat me up, It didn't really matter.

MN: These were the tough girls--the tough white girls beat you up--and what did it mean to be beaten up as a girl in those days? Was it fists?

MC: It was scary. It was scary. Sure, it was fists.

MN: Would you be jumped by more than one person at once or would it be one--

MC: Nobody really hurt you. They would follow you home and push you and push you and try to get a response out of you, but if you didn't turn around and fight back that's all they did. They just kept--

MN: What were some of the names they called you? You don't remember?

MC: No.

MN: You don't remember the vivid terms?

MC: Yes.

MN: And did you turn around and fight?

MC: Maybe once or twice, yes.

MN: And what would the girls--I know what guys--I went through a lot of this, so I know what guys--

MC: Pulling hair and tearing clothes.

MN: But people would never hit you with a chain or a stick?

MC: No. No. Those were different times. Those were boys and that was when they started the gang thing.

MN: OK. To be continued. Thank you so much.