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D'Augustino

Bronx African American History Project
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Transcriber: Laura Kelly

Mark Naison (MN): If anybody is interested in being interviewed, you are welcome to come over here and I'll give you an example of how we do this. This is - - we've got about 38 of these and - -

Woman 1: [inaudible] and we moved in to the Bronx. We moved in '47. The neighborhood I moved in - - there wasn't anybody - - we were the only blacks.

MN: What street was this on?

W1: [inaudible] was Oak Tree Place. But then we moved from Oak Tree Place on to Belmont Avenue. Twenty one twenty one Belmont. There I stayed about almost 50 years. I raised my children there. They went to St. Martin's.

MN: Oh you went to St. Martin of Tours.

W1: St. Martin of Tours. But I moved in the neighborhood that wasn't - - St. Martin of Tours got burned down. We built a church, and that was my parish. That's where my children went to school. They grew up there. They went to college and everything. Well, we were the only black people in the neighborhood. The Laundromat on 180th street - - we were the only black in that building down there. It was Italians and Jews. We had a harder time leaving that place. My husband and me - - myself - - had to walk my children to school because the Italians weren't used to black people in the neighborhood. We were close by the Italians - - nothing but Italian. Finally they got used to us, but long gone. My kids were in school everyday, my kids came home with a bruise on them. My husband had to go, or I - - we finally straightened things out.

MN: Did they go to Catholic school or public school.

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W1: They went to Catholic school-St. Martin's. And from there to the [inaudible]-that's Catholic. We are Catholic. They used to march us to church, those boys, in the back of us, calling us all kinds of names. In those days we weren't called blacks, we were called niggers. That's what - - in the old days. Whether you all know it or not, that's what we were called. Finally they began coming around. We lived there - - my husband say we're going to sell the house, we're going to live here without any cause.

MN: Now, you bought a house there.

W1: No, we didn't buy a house. We bought a house first off of Washington Avenue. When we first moved there we bought a live-in, took out the money and invested in a live-in.

MN: On Washington and where?

W1: On Washington and 166th street. We bought a live-in from 2 Irish people. We stayed there for about 2 years. That house cost us more than what we put in. Then we moved from there - - where I am now. That's where I stayed because I knew my husband [inaudible] - - and me, myself, I'm still there.

MN: And this is on Belmont?

W1: No I'm not living on Belmont. Right around the corner - - I'm a senior citizen now, I'm 86. So I'm around the corner now.

MN: Now, how did you get that apartment in that neighborhood?

W1: Through our lawyer, through our lawyer. My husband - - through our lawyer - - that's how I [inaudible].

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MN: Now, when you were going through all these things in that Italian neighborhood, did you ever think of moving back into Morrisania where - -

W1: No because where [inaudible] in those days - - they say Harlem [inaudible] - - Harlem in those days wasn't Harlem. Now everybody is going back to Harlem. It's the same as where I'm living now. Italians were running away from us. They were burning down the houses, they - - Friday night we would be in the street because they were burning the house down in the back of us, or on the side. The landlord was paying these people to burn these houses down. I guess you all know about that.

MN: Now, you lived through the fires - - the neighborhood you lived in, how far north of Tremont was it, where you moved to?

W1: Just around the corner about 2 blocks.

MN: Two blocks north of Tremont. What year did you move to that apartment?

W1: Where I live now?

MN: No, to the one where you moved with your husband in Belmont.

W1: Oh. We moved there in '47.

MN: And how long have you lived in the house you're I now?

W1: I've been there 22 years. The building is 23 years old. And I was the president of that building. I was the president.

MN: Now did you work with the Crotona Community Coalition?

W1: I worked with the Crotona Community Coalition with - -

MN: Jacob?

[inaudible]

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W1: Jacob I know when he came here [inaudible] - - and I worked with him in that neighborhood until he died. And me, myself, I was an administrator of buildings. I saved the building where we were living because they were going to tear it down, and I went to school to study to be an administrator, and I saved that building.

MN: Now where did your children end up going to college?

W1: My daughter went to - - my son, he went to [pause] - - what's the one off of - -

MN: Not Fordham?

W1: No, no, no. My daughter [inaudible] Lehman. My daughter went to Lehman. And my son he went over to community college. And in the mean time, I had lost my husband when my kids were still in Catholic school. But through Mrs. Diggs, Estelle Diggs, she opened up a way for me to get more for my kids in college.

MN: Now your husband owned a Laundromat?

W1: That's right.

MN: And where was this Laundromat located?

W1: It was 180th street between Arthur and Beaumont. We were the only - - there used to be Italians and Jews - - they would bring their clothes and go to work and leave them.

And my husband would always call them and give them back - - the neighborhood, they got to like us very well. My husband passed away - - when he passed - - left me with the Laundromat, so I sold the Laundromat. I didn't sell it right then because it began getting - - the blacks were in the neighborhood, moving in. The Spanish were moving in. All nationalities. Every time you turned around they were breaking in the Laundromat. They

were taking stock. They did so many things to me until I was ready to give it away for nothing.

MN: When did you first notice the landlords burning the buildings around where you were living?

W1: We lived there about 6 years before we found out that the landlords were burning down the buildings. They even started burning down 180th street because from 3rd avenue all the way to southern blvd. you could buy anything you want, there were stores all along there. But after they started burning, they burned down all the way down. There were no stores, no nothing. Now they have all little town halls.

MN: Right. I know that neighborhood pretty well because I have worked with Father Flynn at St. Martin's.

W1: That's my parish.

MN: And Sr. Barbara at _____. Because that neighborhood was hit very hard by the crack epidemic in the 80's and 90's.

W1: Very hard, very hard. Father Flynn comes to me every [inaudible] to bring me communion because I'm not able to go to church anymore because I'm feverish now, so. But still, that's my parish.

MN: He's a wonderful person.

W1: Very good. He changed the neighborhood.

MN: I was teaching at Fordham then and working on Save the Generation program which is the youth program - -

W1: That's him, he's in the Save the Generation program.

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MN: Right. Now, do you remember what happened on Tremont Avenue during the 1977 blackout?

W1: They had the blackout and they looted the place. They looted Tremont Avenue. We had to - - that was the night of my birthday, I'll never forget it. On the 14th, we planned a party in my house. My girlfriends, they said lets take the party upstairs. We went out and were sitting in the streets. All these young men came along with televisions, washing machines. I was right there seeing all this stuff in the streets - - stopping us - - we were sitting there stopping by - - you want to buy a washing machine? You want a television? All this they had, these young men. That was some blackout.

MN: Now 180th street was once a business district and it burned?

W1: Oh it was very busy, it was [inaudible]. There was on the the corner of Beaumont and 180th street, there was a factory there. It made all the uniforms for St. Martin's. There was a store there also. You could buy anything you wanted on 180th street. But not there's nothing there.

MN: Now did you work with Jacob and the other people building those small houses, or were you more involved in the - -

W1: I had even helped them sell some of those houses - -

MN: Oh!

W1: - - I helped to get people to move into some of those houses. Even the building I'm living in now, I stood on the corner and I helped people to get in my building where I am. I sit out on the streets on 180th street and Beaumont when there was - - there wasn't a light there. The children would come from the corners - - from the school there on the

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corner, and one kid got hit by a car, so we got together, I sat on the street all night long in the cold to get a light on that corner. The police men came along and said to me that if they catch us there again they would come back and if I was there, they were going to put us in jail. When they came back, I was sitting there. To save a life - - we got the light there. The light is there. So we got the light there. When I moved to where I am there wasn't a mailbox there on the corner [inaudible]. I called and I got the mailbox there on the corner. And right across the street from me now on Prospect Avenue and 180th street, I had that light put in for the senior citizens.

MN: Now how did you learn how to organize to get these things? Were you a member of a political club? Did you know the elected officials?

W1: Anything went wrong I went to planning board 6.

MN: So you go through the community planning board - -

W1: The community planning board. And when I went to the community planning board I got what I wanted.

MN: When did you start having to become an activist? Was this when you were - -

W1: I had started acting in the neighborhood when they started burning down the houses - - I started acting in the neighborhood when I see that they didn't want me in the neighborhood. They didn't want us there. They called us monkeys. They called us everything. They stood behind the curtain and peeped at us and slammed the door if they saw us coming in the house. They didn't want us in there. My husband said we're staying here if we have to [inaudible] - - staying here. We stayed right there.

MN: Daniel or Patricia, do you have any questions that you want to ask? What's your last name?

W1: Jones.

MN: Okay, Mrs. Jones.

D?: Were there any Jews or Italians or Irish who were not - - who were helping you?

W1: My neighbor, I'll never forget her, was Jewish, and her name was ____ - - the lady's name was _____. She had a blind husband that was my neighbor. And one side was Jewish, and next over there was Irish, next to me.

D?: Were any of them trying to help you?

W1: Help me with what?

D?: Not help you - - I'm just saying like were any of them sympathetic to what you were going through? Were any of them trying to - -

W1: They didn't try to help. When I really got help, Sr. Barbara from North Bronx - - Jacob, Jacob moved in the neighborhood. This is when I began to get a little help from the Italians, not from the Jews because the Jews went running up to co-op city. This is when I - - am I right? They went running up to co-op city.

[speaking]

MN: Did anybody, when you first moved in, stand up and say, this shouldn't happen?

Was anybody willing to stand up for you in the first years when you and your husband moved there?

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W1: When my husband first moved there, there was what you call candy stores. Maybe you young people don't know about that, but we know about that-what we call candy stores, am I right?

Voices: Yes that's right.

W1: Where the young people meet and have their sodas and ice cream on a Sunday.

Well this is what was in the neighborhood. My son and my daughter were on the way to mass on a Sunday. You had to - - in those days the parents had to go to church with their children. So I'm walking with my son and my daughter to mass. This kid walks up behind my son and kicked my son. There was no - - little boys, teenagers. I turned around and I said why did you do that? What they would do to me - - I don't know where these young boys come from, they all come and they start. I said to my son listen - - mommy I want to go back home, I want to go to daddy - - I said no, we're going on to mass. We went on to mass. When I got back to the house I told my husband. My husband went in this candy store. When he went in the candy store every kid ran. I was so afraid. Every kid ran. After that occasion we had not one more confrontation. I never had any more, but one more. This time, one of the boys was beating up my son from the school. When he was beating him - - you know in those days those girls had [inaudible] shoes. And daughter kicked these Italian boys on the leg with those shoes - - don't beat my brother, don't beat my brother. I'm in the house minding my business, these two Italian mothers come to me [inaudible] [laughter]. Your son, your daughter - - look at the bruises on my son's leg. I said look don't come to me telling me what my daughter did to your son. My daughter is small and your son is 16 years old. And you bringing me this, I don't want to

hear nothing. You come here telling me - - the times my kids came home bloodied and everything, bleeding - - then I says, and I didn't come to you about it and now you coming to me. When I got finished with those 2 ladies, they were hugging my neck. From then on those kids wanted to sleep in my house day and night and were with my kids all the time, they lived like this and we had no more problems. No more problems.

MN: Did you get help from the sisters at the school and the priests in the parish when this stuff was going on?

W1: I did not get anybody but my husband because I didn't go to none of the [inaudible]. Monsignor - - we had a monsignor there. We had a monsignor Blake. Monsignor Blake and my husband were friends on the east side. Monsignor Blake, he would come and he would talk to us and tell us, you know. And he would always stay on the good side and tell us to stay on the good side and don't go, don't let them run us. He was a very nice - - he was a good Monsignor.

MN: Patricia, do you have any questions?

P?: Yes, I want to ask about the fires. In the aftermath of the fires, what kind of community organizations - - what kind of programs did they do to help build the community back up? Because I know that fires left the community very ravaged - -

W1: Yes. I went downtown with Jacob. We used to go all over. And we would go downtown [inaudible]. Well we finally got - - I don't remember now, the company that was willing to come in to build these little small town halls. They got money - - I'm trying to say that this company took the money, then disappeared with the money that was progress to build the neighborhood - - took the money and disappeared. So they had

him, they tried to catch him to put him in court. Then Jacob's sister - - [inaudible] they decided they would try something else. Well finally we got another contractor to come in a rebuild - - started to build [inaudible]. On Prospect avenue was the first one that was built but now they have a lot of [inaudible].

MN: Dr. Ward do you have any questions?

Dr. Ward (DW): Hi Mrs. Jones. This a very moving story. I'm very deeply affected by what you have been saying so far. I'm here because I did a history of the first black family church in Newark, New Jersey.

W1: Yes, I know about Newark.

DW: It was started by a group of black women who fought with the church - - to get that church and who found assistance from sisters and certain priests and so on. What I'm interested in knowing from you - - say you're Catholic - - were you born Catholic - -

W1: No, I was converted into Catholic. When I met my husband - - my husband was Catholic. And of course I've been a Catholic for many, many, many, many years of my life. But my husband said to me before we got married, you're going to be my wife, but you have got to be my faith. So, I did go, and now I am a Catholic.

DW: And what were you before that?

W1: I was a Protestant.

[inaudible]

W1: In the Bronx Baptist Church.

MN: Now were you born in New York City?

W1: No I wasn't born in New York City. I was born in Georgia. I've been in New York City practically all my life.

DW: Was your husband from the United States?

W1: My husband was born right here, right in Harlem.

DW: Right in Harlem? And he was - - his family was Catholic all the way back?

W1: His whole family is Catholic.

D?: Where in Georgia were you born?

W1: Me?

D?: Yes. I'm from Tennessee myself so - - where were you born in Georgia?

W1: I was born in Thomasville Georgia. That's near Jacksonville, Florida.

D?: Okay, way down there. How long did you live in Georgia?

W1: To tell the truth we were small kids - - I could give you all the long history but let's cut it short.

[laughter]

MN: So you want to save the Georgia stories for another time? Because we could do Georgia stories too.

DW: Just a couple of more things. So when you went to St. Martin's was that basically an Italian church, or was that mixed or - -

W1: St. Martin's - - it was most Italians and Irish at that church. There wasn't a black - - I was the only black person sitting up in that church.

DW: So when you got inside that church, did you feel welcome?

W1: I felt welcome because God was with me.

Voices: Amen [clapping].

DW: And you could sit anywhere you want in that church and you could take communion?

W1: Any place I want. My kids were baptized, confirmed and everything in there. It didn't make any difference. Even when I was confirmed in the Catholic Church - - my godmother is Italian, so it didn't make any difference for me. I said what I want to say - - said what I wanted to say in the Church [inaudible].

DW: Did you belong to some of the, like the rosary society, or any of those, did you get involved in - -

W1: Then we had sisters and we had brothers, I know you know about them. We had sisters in [inaudible] go around. I used to go up to church to get them to fix the baskets and things to take around to the [inaudible].

DW: Thank you.

MN: Harriet, do you have any questions?

Harriet? (H?): I just want to say, I'm a neighbor, in that my family came to the Bronx in the, let's say the 1930's and I've lived here ever since - - with a short time when I lived in Greenwich Village, and I still live here. And you mentioned something about Mrs. Ditz. Now, I think she was a New York City - - she was appointed by the Lindsay administration or one of the city agencies and I think she was one of the first Latin women that had a high position in city government. And I think her specialty was helping. But you mentioned she helped you with the children somehow.

W1: Helped me to get my children in college.

H?: You needed some help with that.

W1: In those days, they didn't have funding - - the kids couldn't get into college like they can now. Nowadays they can get funding, you all know that. In those days you had to have the money or some kind of celebrity to get your kid into college.

H?: In those days, I'm not sure which days you mean, but I went to Hunter College and I remember the tuition was \$5 a year, that was [inaudible]. That wasn't - - I mean, we knew it was a small fee, but it wasn't that small because then we didn't have that much money. But they were very selective about who they admitted. I went to Walden High school and you had to - - in order to get into Hunter or City college you had to take a test and many of my friends also applied at the same time I did and some of them had to take remedial course before they could be admitted as freshman. But I must say my whole family went to Hunter with the exception of one brother who went to Lincoln. But I came here really to meet you because I'm literally right down the street, I'm on 168th street right off of Prospect Avenue. I had heard from Mark that there was a black community that was up around 180th street and when we were growing up, we didn't know anybody up there. Now it may be - - maybe you weren't there then. Because we moved into the Bronx in 1930 and our first place where we moved was on Prospect Avenue and 169th street down to Holmes street and then we went further down to 166th street. But I remember that my mother was a lady like you in that she was - - I call you a very heroic pioneer because integrating a neighborhood that was non-white was a very - - called for someone with great strength and commitment. And I'm hearing your story and it makes me feel so good inside because I have memories of some of the experiences but not in the

same place, I mean a few blocks away. I used to walk up to Walden high school on 168th street. You know, we'd walk up - -

MN: That's a long walk. Oh, no, what street was it on then?

H?: Walden was on Kingsbridge Avenue and 195th street.

MN: You walked from - -

H?: I remember my friends and I, in the springtime, we would walk all the way to Porter road. We would take that angle where Bainbridge road is and then we cut across and we walk [inaudible]. But mostly we would walk from Walden high school, mornings we had to be on time. But I remember the Belmont area where she's talking about. St. Martin's and when we did take the bus to go to high school, of course we had to pass St. Martin's - - that's ST. Martin's right there on Crotona Avenue right?

MN: Right. Yes.

H?: That's where, that you went to church. And I recall vividly what the community on that side of Crotona Park looked like. And it was all white.

W1: That's right.

H?: And as you got to 180th or Tremont, most of the people were Italian or that was the Italian community. But I think before that they were Jewish. It was a more Jewish section. But what I was going to say is like we were like in an island in a sense because we didn't know that there was a black community, like in the North I would say- - north of Crotona, and I'm sure everybody in here has a story to tell about the good old days. But you mentioned Mrs. Ditzzy - - I remember my mother used to talk about Mrs. Ditzzy

because she was a wonderful person and she was politically connected through I think Mayor LaGuardia, who you may have heard of.

W1: That's right.

MN: So she goes back to that time?

H?: She goes back to that time and I have to ask my kid brother who has all these facts and numbers and everything about her. But she was a beautiful person inside and out.

Maybe we could dig up - - I don't know if she was a [inaudible] but we could check.

W1: Gloria Davis took over her place.

H?: Who's that?

W1: Gloria Davis took over. She planned against her, am I right?

Voices: Yes ma'am.

W1: Gloria Davis took over her place. Gloria Davis and Estelle Digs were the very best of friends. Am I right or wrong? I could to the to Gloria Davis' house with Estelle Digs.

H?: Davis or Davidson?

Voices: Davis.

W1: Davis, Gloria Davis.

[crosstalk]

W1: Gloria Davis - - they were best of friends.

MN: Now you told me that Gloria Davis had been a bar maid at Freddie's.

Voices: Yes.

W1: But Gloria Davis took Estelle's place. She - -

H?: Gloria Davis became the assemblywoman.

[talking]

MN: She still lives here?

W1: [inaudible]

MN: Okay. Do you have any more questions Patricia, Maxine or Daniel? Okay.

D?: Can I ask you one more question? What you were describing about your children - - your children being beaten up at school - - I just have two questions. Did the school teachers or principals do anything to try and stop the beating? They didn't?

W1: [inaudible]

MN: Thank you so much.

[END OF SESSION 1]

[BEGINNING OF SESSION 2]

MN: I also think that you helped rebuild a neighborhood that burned, and that's a story that needs - -

W1: I would make the room to get this one in too. Do you - - now let me get this in.

MN: I'm a low tech person so you've got to excuse me.

W1: That was Fordham hospital on Fordham road. They called it Fordham hospital down - - that they were going to build a hospital in the community where I am living now. Instead they never built - - they took all of those houses where the Jews and Italians moved away from - - the black people came in and bought those houses. Then they turned around - - they thought a hospital was going to - - was going to build another hospital there. They took the houses away from the black people. Some of them got good money for their houses, some of them didn't get anything because they bought the houses

from the Italians and the Jews. And they stayed there in those houses for a short while.

They took those houses, tore them down - - they never built the hospital there. The soccer field is over there in the back of the hospital now - - St. Barnabas hospital soccer field.

And they got a ball field over there by me which is Jacob's field.

MN: Jacob's Field, right. So those were houses that were condemned for a hospital that was never built?

W1: Right.

MN: Now, I have one other question. Art pointed out to me that there was a YWCA on Southern Blvd. and they closed it down right at a time when kids needed a place - - what is the story behind the closing of the YWCA?

W1: I couldn't tell you. The only thing I know they told the YWCA, that's where the young people - - that's the only place they had to go. Then they closed down.

H?: I'm not sure, I wanted to say something about Fordham hospital. That's where I had my first job. I worked in the lab there when I got out of Hunter, I became a lab technician. There was another hospital on 169th and Morris Avenue, Morrisania hospital. I worked there also. Both of those hospitals were closed.

W1: I had a partner - - had a house right there off of 181st street, that she had brought from the Italians - - from some Italians - - loved the house - - and they - - the city - - they [inaudible] talked to her. We didn't know what was happening. But when we knew anything the city took the house. And she said that she never got all of her money back so she moved away from there.

H?: ...about the fires in the Bronx and so forth that may be connected with my brother who - - then connected with the rest of my family. The last people that walked in here were Paula Jenkins and Reverend Rollins who are the other St. Augustine's in the Bronx in this community. There is such a rich story here that - - I mean if you start going to Barbados and to Florence, Alabama, where my family was from, or to Georgia, Thomasville - - I mean, I think what really Mark, what we're going to try to have to figure out, the configuration of what you want to do. Because this lady here who hasn't said anything yet to you, she was telling me something, just in a few words, about the beauty shop that she worked in. I'm sure that she has a story that is probably just as rich as - -

[talking]

[END OF SESSION 2]

[BEGINNING OF SESSION 3]

MN: Okay, was that Claremont Village?

Woman 2(W2): Right.

MN: Where were you living before then?

W2: 127th street [inaudible]

MN: Okay, so you moved to the Bronx in the 1960's? When they built the Claremont houses.

W2: Right.

MN: Now you had been in the beauty business. Could you explain a little about your store?

W2: I graduated in 1932 in Louisville, Kentucky under Madam C.J.Walk.

MN: You trained under Madame C.J. Walk?

[interruption]

W2: When I was young, around about 22, in Louisville, Kentucky - - [inaudible] - - but I had a beauty shop there in 1942.

MN: Now how did you end up coming to New York City?

W2: By getting married. My husband was from Savanna, Georgia, and his people lived here in New York. So I got married in 1944 and then we came to New York. He was a step sergeant in the army. That's when I met him.

MN: Now did you open up a beauty salon when you came to New York City.

W2: Yes I did, between [inaudible] avenue and 5th avenue. First I worked in a shop on Madison Avenue.

MN: Now what kind of work did your husband do when he left the armed forces?

W2: Worked for the city [inaudible].

MN: Oh, okay. Was he in subway or bus?

W2: Subway.

MN: I'm going to leave it to Patricia to ask some of the beauty questions because this is not my expertise.

Patricia: Some beauty questions. Okay, first of all, how hard was it to set up a business for a black woman?

W2: It was very easy because when I graduated from beauty school in Louisville, Kentucky, I had my shop - - I opened up the shop then and my father died and [inaudible]

got in so I went to beauty school then. And my mother said I was too young. I said 'No, just let me try.' And so I graduated in 1944 and I've been doing hair ever since. Up until last Tuesday - - last Monday I retired from doing it 2 days a week at Hudson Center for 18 years. I had all my [inaudible] so I said it was time for me to get out.

[laughter]

[END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A]

[BEGINNING OF TAPE 1 SIDE B]

MN: Wow. So when you were - - you came to New York. How did you go about attracting customers to a new store?

W2: I first worked in a beauty shop for Madison Avenue for a lady. And then when she went out of business I went to advertise this shop for her to go out. Then I opened up mine at 127th and 11th avenue.

?: So she got - - you had your own clientele from the previous experience, so they just came with you to that shop?

W2: What?

?: The people that you serviced at the shop - -

W2: Yes, the other customers.

?: - - they followed you to your new place?

W2: First I went home because I decided after I had my first child to open up the shop in my home. He let - - I had - - the one that owned the shop he was Italian and he let me open up a beauty shop there on the top floor and I sent to Kentucky and got my

[inaudible] and I opened up there until my [inaudible] was two years old. The first one I had was a single, the next was twins.

MN: So how many children did you have?

W2: Four.

MN: Four children.

W2: And two missed.

MN: When you moved to the Bronx - - and this was - - were your children grown at that time or they were still in school?

W2: When I came to the Bronx? I think they were - - they were born in the Bronx, I think.

MN: Okay so when you say - - do you remember the name of the project you moved to - - was it - -

W2: When I moved - -

MN: - - to the Bronx? Do you remember what year you moved to the Bronx? Was it in the 50's or the 60's, or - -

W2: This is the Bronx right?

MN: Yes.

W2: And I had a shop here in the Bronx. I moved in the Bronx - - when they first opened the projects, what year was that?

MN: Well it depends which projects.

W2: The new, the new projects where I worked [inaudible] avenue. The projects - - when I came here we had private houses but they opened up the new projects. Nobody was ever in my building but me.

MN: Okay, so you were the first one in that building?

W2: Right.

MN: So did you open a beauty shop in the Bronx after you moved to the Bronx?

W2: Yes, 18 years ago later. When I came up here.

MN: Were most of the women whose hair you did from Harlem? The ones at the shop you owned on Lenox Avenue and 127th street.

W2: Yes they were in Harlem. But when I moved to the Bronx I had a lot of the customers from the Bronx and I outlived them. They all died out. I used to work from ten in the morning to four in the afternoon. And after they all died, I decided two weeks ago it was time for me to leave - - retire.

MN: Now what church did you belong to in New York City? Were you a member of a church?

W2: First I joined Mount O'Ryan. That was my first church. Next time when I moved to the Bronx I went to - - oh, what is that church? - - 169th. I just left them last - - a year ago and I'm at [inaudible] now in Manhattan. Because I live in Manhattan, in Riverton, and I've been there since 1994.

MN: So how do you get to this center?

W2: By bus.

MN: You take the bus from Riverton in Manhattan to come here?

W2: Right. Then I belonged to Hudson Center. I belonged to 127th street center. I make two and three centers in 7 days.

MN: And you all do this by public transportation?

W2: All by public transportation. And I'm 90 years old. So I thank God on Sunday.

MN: Now, when you moved to New York, did you miss Louisville? Did you miss Kentucky?

W2: No because my husbands people were all here and they took me right in - - about me being a hairdresser - - everybody [inaudible].

D: What was your community like in Kentucky, was it predominantly black, was it - -

W2: We had soldiers stationed at Fort Knox. You know about it. And my husband was stationed there and he was a staff sergeant. And so I met him [inaudible]. I had my beauty shop then. I had a beauty shop when I was about 27, 28.

MN: How did you stay unmarried so long? You're very good looking.

[laughter]

W2: I was very popular but I enjoyed the [inaudible]. So my husband said I always sit in the [inaudible] when I eat. It looks like I wasn't interested in what the [inaudible] was telling me. I said well they talk and talk and I'm listening. So there wasn't anything for me to say because I'm [inaudible] so I just listen. I had my own beauty shop then you know.

MN: Now were you able to keep your business going when you had children?

W2: Yes. When I had my first son, I went home and got my [inaudible] and my landlord let me open up a shop in the house. That was on the top floor. [inaudible] And I only had

a few people's hair that I washed because all of my other customers come up these 7 flights of steps and these people would tell the landlord I was using up all the hot water. And we didn't have a good super. So then I went over - - when my baby son was two years old, I opened up a shop at 127th and between Lenox and 5th. And they were telling the landlord I used up all the hot water. So he said well I'm so [inaudible]. And I said thank you, you were beautiful to me. So I went from there on up.

MN: Now, what denomination have you been church wise?

W2: Baptist.

MN: You're a Baptist. Always a Baptist.

W2: And my children were born Catholic because they went to school and at that time the teacher had died, and so I figured if they go to Catholic school it would be much better. So my children were Catholic. But my older son he is Baptist because he was christened as a Baptist.

DW: So three of your children became Catholic, they chose to be Catholic?

W2: I had four - -

DW: You had four children right?

W2: Yes. Three were Catholic. The older son, he wasn't. When he went to Catholic school he was 10 years old. So he said he wasn't Catholic. But the others were raised Catholic. I learned Catholic too. I only went to class. Because you had to go to school - - you had to go to class so they could go to school.

MN: Now was your husband Catholic?

W2: No, he was Methodist.

MN: He was Methodist. But did he ever convert to - -

W2: No, he was from Savannah, Georgia.

?: Did you all attend different churches as the children were growing up then, or did the children decide - -

W2: No, I would go take them to Catholic school - - I mean church, early. Then I'd come back to Baptist. I always took them to Catholic school. I mean Catholic Church because you had to be to mass.

MN: So you would essentially go to mass - -

W2: I would take them first and then come back to Baptist church [inaudible].

MN: Did you ever find it like confusing to be in 2 different churches in the same day?

W2: No, I took up Catholic. I went to study. But I never joined [inaudible], you know back in those days.

MN: Now how would you describe the difference between a Catholic mass and a Baptist service?

W2: Well Baptists, we have preaches - - he preaches and we sing and everything. And Catholic mass - - you go to mass and the priest has to come around and they give you sacrament.

?: Sacrament- the Holy Communion.

W2: Holy Communion, right.

MN: Now when your children were going to church, was there singing in Catholic Church?

W2: Yes. My baby son, he's still [inaudible] a Catholic - - he's an FBI. And my older son, he works in Riverton.

MN: Oh, he works in the building complex that you live in?

W2: Uh huh.

MN: Okay.

W2: So I've been wonderfully blessed. And my twins - - one of my twins - - he was - - both of them were [inaudible]. One of them went to Lehman College.

DW: I just wanted to ask, when you lived in Harlem and then in the Bronx, did you - - were you aware of a lot of churches and people going to church? Was that a part of your life?

W2: I always went to Mount O'Ryan. And I lived right around the corner from it. And then when the pastor died, then we had another pastor, and he got killed by a car. So then I would come - - you know, go move my membership to the Bronx.

DW: Oh, okay.

MN: Now, was there ever a point where you felt unsafe traveling in public transportation? Where you know, you were worried about leaving the house or going on a bus because there was a lot of violence?

W2: No I was never afraid. [inaudible] at me for going to church at night. I was never afraid. I take God with me and go all the time because he's been so good to me - - 90 years old and from Tennessee to Kentucky, from Kentucky to New York. So I have a lot to thank God for - - and I'm 90 years old - - no aches and pains.

MN: And you're going to take the bus back to Harlem?

W2: I travel by bus all the time, all the time. No aches and pains.

MN: Wow. Is there anything that you ate over the years that you attribute your health to?

Any foods that we should be eating?

[laughter]

W2: I attribute - - I take sauerkraut juice, that's my medicine.

MN: Sauerkraut juice?

W2: Uh, huh. Used to could buy it like orange juice. And they found out it was a medicine. Orange - - I mean sauerkraut juice. And so that's what I take all the time.

MN: Now did you learn about that in the South? Or this is something you figured out later?

W2: No, I learned that when I was a youngster. Lady from the foreign country, from Africa, told me that it was a medicine. Used to could buy it just like orange juice in the store. And they found out it was a medicine so they take it away. You can get it in a health store.

MN: Okay. Now where did you meet a lady from Africa when you were growing up - - this was in Tennessee or Kentucky?

W2: No, Kentucky. When my children were little, I met her. She lived downstairs and I lived upstairs.

MN: Now was she a foreign student?

W2: She was born a lady. She was a lady from a - - from the West Indies.

MN: Oh, she's West Indian? Okay.

W2: She was West Indian.

MN: And she told you about sauerkraut juice?

W2: Yes. She told me about the juice. And you could buy it just like orange juice in the store. Then a year later they found out it was a medicine so they take it away. Cuz she told me it was a medicine. And so that's what I've always taken - - still take it.

MN: Now when you were younger did you go dancing?

W2: Yeah, very popular.

MN: What kind of music did you dance to? Any favorite bands?

W2: What we did was - - Charleston - -

MN: Charleston? Really?

DW: Well you were born in what year now?

W2: 1913.

DW: 1913.

D?: In Tennessee?

DW: Well my mom did the Charleston and she was born in 1950. So my mom taught me the Charleston.

[laughter]

MN: Really? Now did you do the Lindy Hop also?

W2: I was smaller than I am now and I still have my shape.

[laughter]

W2: That's what they tell me now. I passed the street and [inaudible]. And all along the street they say 'Mamma you're together.' I'm not dressed like in the day but they say I

know how to put it together. Well they taught me in beauty school that if you couldn't make yourself look different you couldn't do nothing to nobody else.

MN: Now, did you go dancing when you were in Louisville?

W2: Oh, yeah. Very popular.

MN: Now what were some of the bands?

W2: They would take their cars - - I loved Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway. My husband like shows, I didn't like shows. But I go to shows with him so he would go to Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway. That's who I loved to go to the theatre, you know, the Apollo Theatre.

DW: Apollo Theatre?

W2: Uh, huh.

MN: Now did you go to the Apollo Theatre when you were living in Harlem.

W2: That's what I'm talking about.

MN: Oh, okay, the shows at the Apollo.

W2: That's where we would go to the shows - - Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway.

MN: Now did you ever go to shows in the Bronx? Did you and your husband ever go to clubs up here?

W2: Yes I had [inaudible] after we came to New York. At least his [inaudible] got a little bad. He started having trouble with [inaudible]. They operated on him in Harlem Hospital, they weren't even doctors. So I went to see him and he says to me 'if anything happens to me,' first he said 'pray for me, and if anything happens to me get a good

lawyer.' But I didn't, and it came out later years they weren't even doctors that operated on him. So he died in '44.

MN: Now were you left alone with four children after he died?

W2: They were grown.

MN: Oh, okay, so the children were grown.

W2: My baby son, he has 2 daughters, and my oldest son has one daughter. And I have a [inaudible] grandson, he's four months old, and he looked up when he was born as if just to say what's happening.

[laughter]

MN: Any other questions?

W2: I've had a beautiful life. And God is good. So I always pray to him and thank him because he has kept me - - you see me 90 years old.

MN: Yeah, well we got to get some sauerkraut juice. If - - you could start a company marketing - - put your picture on it and market sauerkraut juice it would definitely sell, all the yuppies would buy it.

[laughter]

W2: It is good. No aches and pains. Only I have - - hearing. And that was wax that built up [inaudible]. And of course I had it [inaudible] about 10 years ago, and this is the worst trouble I've had was a year later. Now I'm better - - the week before last I couldn't hear at all.

D?: I have 2 questions. One - - the first one is, over your long career in beauty school and in doing hair, did you ever do white peoples hair and - -

W2: Uh, huh. When I first started, I had a lot of white customers. But see all you had to do [inaudible]. So then when I had all these customers when I had my shop, I had to let them go because I couldn't do their hair with all them. And they wanted me to do it. And the girls - - I had 3 girls that worked with me but they wanted me to curl it all the time. I tell them they have to let the other girls help some of the time, I couldn't do it all. All of my customers always wanted me to curl. I was - - loved to curl - - when I was a kid, I used to try to curl with a fork. And my grandmother said 'you gonna die and go to hell curlin hair.' [laughter] I always loved to curl. So I would give curls and all of my customers wanted me to curl, but I couldn't curl everybody - - I had three girls working in the shop. So you had to let them curl you sometime. I said but I'll do the best I can. They all wanted me to curl. They would let the girls cut them, but I had to curl.

D?: And the ladies - - the white ladies who came into the store - -

W2: Yeah, I used to do them. All I had to do was curl and wave.

D?: Was this in the 60's or the 50's or the 40's?

W2: In - - that was when I first finished beauty school.

D?: In the 40's.

MN: That was in Kentucky then?

W2: That was in Kentucky.

MN: But in Harlem your clients were all black?

W2: All black. They were in Kentucky when I did the white, when I first graduated.

D?: And the second question, you were in Harlem during the 60's, do you ever remember seeing or hearing Malcolm X or any of the other civil rights leaders?

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W2: Yeah. Malcolm X - - I think I went to his meetings about twice. He was very good.

And I went to - - when Malcolm X got killed in the Bronx I had been to that theatre

[inaudible].

D?: _____ Ballroom.

W2: Right. I had been there.

D?: Have you been in that place before?

W2: To hear him. I was there I think about 2 Sundays before he got killed.

D?: Is that right?

W2: And then we had a march. They didn't want nothing to go in there. Malcolm X - - people wanted to go there. So they told them they would let his picture be there but they built - - now it's a beautiful restaurant.

MN: Yeah, there's a restaurant right across from Columbia Presbyterian hospital. They have an upscale café in the old Audubon Ballroom.

W2: Right. They didn't want it to be there, our people didn't. But they told them they would let Malcolm X's picture be there.

MN: Right. Yeah.

W2: And they went right on. They marched and all that. I didn't go for that. And they marched when they were building the - - on 7th avenue - -

MN: In Harlem or in - -

W2: In Harlem.

[crosstalk]

W2: On 7th avenue between 127th. You know the building?

MN: Oh the big office building?

W2: Office building.

MN: Oh the Harlem office building because they were displacing some of the local businesses.

W2: I was there when they didn't want that building. They marched and set up, laid on mattresses and whatnot [laughs]. But I didn't go for that I would just watch it and see it.

Maxine Gordon (MG): Do you remember when Adam Powell was signed to get black people to work in the five and 10 on a hundred and - -

W2: I marched in that and I went to work in the five and ten for a while when we got it. And my goddaughter she was the first [inaudible] - - what was the department store?

MN: Blumstein's?

W2: Blumstein's. I walked for them to get black in there. We had all white in the drug store and all in there. But when we marched to get in the store, the five and ten store, I went there and worked for a while as a counter girl. And I got so many tips, they said, 'How'd you get so many tips?' [laughter] I said 'well [inaudible] from the beauty shop.' I still had that shop.

MG: When did you first come to the Bronx? Was it after WWII or before?

W2: After WWII. Yeah. My husband was in WWII. He was a staff sergeant.

MG: And where did you live when you first came to the Bronx?

W2: In - - what's the house? - - the place built - - the projects.

MG: Claremont Village.

W2: Claremont Village. That's where my shop was where I just quit.

MN: So what's the name of the place in Claremont Village where you cut hair? The Hudson - -

W2: The Hudson Center.

MN: Oh, there's a - -

MG: Yeah, there's a senior center there on 168th street and Webster Avenue.

W2: Right.

MN: And that's called the Hudson Center. And you've been cutting hair there for 18 years?

W2: I've been [inaudible] and cutting. I've lived two [inaudible]. So after all - - I've outlived all my customers I said it's time for me to quit, so I quit last Monday [laughs].

MG: Did they have a party for you? The customers, did they - -

W2: No, but they told me to keep in touch with them. I went back to them and took [inaudible]. So they told me to keep in touch - - they were going to keep in touch with me.

MG: Do you remember the - - there was a big supermarket across from the Claremont Houses. And I forget the name of it but it was owned by a man named Louellen. He became a millionaire. This was a supermarket chain - -

MN: Oh, that was Bruce Louellen.

MG: Bruce Louellen right. But the first store that he had was on Webster avenue and about 116 - -

MN: Oh really? Because he founded a hundred black men, that organization.

MG: But that was, you know, that was before he - - well he may have been on the [inaudible] with a hundred black men anyway. And my sister went to school with his - - his I guess niece or something. But that I think at one time was the largest New York City Housing development in the city.

W2: First they had Claremont Houses then they all moved out in the Bronx.

MN: Right.

W2: You were a teacher there in school?

MG: No, I taught over here on 165th street and between Union and Tinton. Do you remember me?

W2: When we had a senior center down there for a while.

MG: You know, Forrest neighborhood houses. And my daughter went to the day care center and I was involved with that.

MN: So you used to go to Forrest neighborhood house?

W2: Uh huh. I went to all of them. Still make three or four centers.

MG: Well that was when the [inaudible] went to the Bronx.

[crosstalk]

MG: Yeah, and do you remember the day care center they had there for the little - - the little kids. I was the president of the parent association of that day care center when it first opened because my daughter went to the day care center.

W2: My memory of that is a little foggy, I forget. But I said I thank god I'm as well as I am.

MG: They call that - - you're having a senior moment.

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[laughter]

MN: Right, that's what they say, having a senior moment. Okay, well thank you very much, this is a great - -

W2: And thank you. And god bless ya'll.

[END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B]