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Transcriber: Jacqueline Soboti

Mark Naison (MN): The second interview for the Bronx African American History Project. And the person I'm interviewing is Nathan Dukes; who grew up in the Patterson Houses, is now a community activist in the Bronx, and has also been an educator and youth worker. And in his youth was a legendary basketball player. So, without further ado, let's get to the questions. Nathan, when did your family move to the Patterson Houses?

Nathan "Bubba" Dukes (ND): Well, I think it was around, in the 50's-- We first came from South Carolina-- Columbia, Columbia, South Carolina. Then we moved over into the Tinton Avenue area in the South Bronx. Then from there we moved in the Patterson Houses. So I believe that could've been around '55, '56, or so.

MN: Ok, did you know other families in the Patterson Houses when you moved there?

ND: My dad did, my dad did. But being a youngster, being a youngster, we had to basically try to assimilate-- into the neighborhood and make friends. But, my dad, he knew, he knew of some other families because they came off of Prospect/Tinton Avenue area. And when the projects open up, I guess it's a big thing for people to move into the projects and move away from the tenement, the tenement housing.

MN: What is your memory of the tenement housing, that you had lived in when you were very young?

ND: Oh, I loved it! My, my father was a superintendent of the building on Tinton Avenue and I loved it. Because every Friday, every Friday, especially during the summer times, what would happen was, we would go around the corner on Tinton Avenue, 161st Street, Tinton Avenue, and there was Mr. Johnson's rib, chicken, and potato salad place. And the lines would be backed up

especially on a Friday. Also, during the summer times, we used to play in the Johnny, the Johnny pumps, in the fire hydrants. And, and also, we'd play stickball, we'd play stickball in the street. And this was all done at a very early age, I think what I was about in the early 50's, were the meat stores.

MN: Now, when you moved to the Patterson Houses, was the composition of the population there different then Tinton Avenue?

ND: No, not really. It was basically like a migration; where people moved from Tinton Avenue, Prospect Avenue over into Patterson Houses or so, because this was a new thing. The Projects were relatively new and they were accommodating, if you will. It was much different, heat and hot water and everything included within the rent.

MN: Now, what are your earliest memories of the Patterson Houses when, when you came there?

ND: My earliest memories of the Patterson Houses, when I came there-- It was, it looked huge! Just humongous! When I go back now and I look at the projects now, its not that big but as a youngster it was a very, very, large, very, large development.

MN: Was it intimidating to live in something that big or was it more exciting?

ND: It was very exciting because you made friends real quick. Lenny Gesle was one of my friends, he saw me in the hallway he said, "Hi, what's your name?" And Tommy Murphy and then, Archibald family-- And then Junie, Junie Clinton, they moved away to Queens many moons ago before we actually, before we actually got into our teenage years, Junie Clinton so. There was Julio Perez, Julio Perez, he was Latino. And he also became the district leader in the South Bronx, he worked very closely with Frank Lugavinia and now who is the

congressman, Congressman Jose Serrano, but at that particular time, Serrano was an assemblyman.

MN: Now, in my interview with Victoria Archibald-Good, she said everybody looked out for one another in the Patterson Houses in the 1950's. Was she right about that?

ND: She was absolutely, right. You couldn't get away with anything. Especially the moms and the pops, you know, the dads, they'd be out on the benches or so, and they'd see you going in the wrong direction. If you went in the wrong direction by the time you came back, everybody in the neighborhood would know that you went outside of The Projects or you went to a location that you didn't, you weren't supposed to be. And that was it. You know you get a, well at that time, what everybody called it, you'd get a whooping, you'd get a whooping.

MN: Where most of the par-- families in the Patterson Houses, when you moved in, two parent families?

ND: Yes. Most of them were two parent families, right. I think at the time that the projects was-- had just opened-- I think that, that was one of the prerequisites to move in, that you had-- there had to be two parents in the household.

MN: Right. Now what kind of jobs did the fathers work in, when you moved in, in the families that you knew about?

ND: Well, this was the post-war era so a lot of the, a lot of the men maintaining employment, they had factory jobs. Like my dad, my dad was working in furniture and he was an assembler. And had other guys who were working in the dairy, in the milk daisy on the assembly lines, if you will, bottling milk at that particular time. You had also, you had a lot of guys who were basically-- they were picking up-- what was then known as the junkmen-- they were picking up a lot of scrap metal, scrap metal and cooper. A lot of them made a living on that

level. You also had a lot of them, the male figures of the household, case in point with Mr., Mr. Russell. He became a Burns Security Guard. And he moved up into the ranks of lieutenant, and his son was a very, very good friend of mine; Minor Russell died about maybe two years ago. And, he played on our softball team, the Patterson Knights. But basically a lot of the jobs that were held by the males in that particular era were in the factories.

MN: Now, were the factories in the area? Were a lot of them in the South Bronx or were some of them in Manhattan and Queens as well?

ND: A lot of them were in the South Bronx and a lot of them were in the Boston Road area.

MN: A lot of the fathers walked to work. And if they were fortunate enough to save their monies, they would buy a used car and they would drive to work. Or they would take public transportation, because you know at that particular time, there was the El; there was the El on Third Avenue, the Third Avenue El. That would run from Third Avenue, I think it was all the way up to Prospect Avenue. I think Prospect was the last stop.

MN: Now, of the families, would you say more were from the South or, of the African-American families, would you say more were from the South or from the Caribbean?

ND: Well, at that time, at that time, we weren't really conscious about that you know, about that fact. But most of the families, from my understanding now, it was a mixture. You had folks coming in from Charleston, South Carolina, Columbia, Virginia, Tennessee. And also, there was that mixture of folks who came from the Caribbean-- folks who came from Barbados, who came from Jamaica. One of our friends, Ray Hodge, his family was basically strictly, strictly Jamaican, and they kind of kept to their selves. And Ray was, he was high achiever in school. He played softball well, he did, he did everything well, anything Ray Hodge did, he did well. He ran well, he ran fast, he played softball well, he played baseball well, could hit real

well, he played basketball well-- As a matter of fact, we went to Wagner College and made All-American and was drafted by the Knicks, unfortunately, he didn't stave off the last cut and he was during the Walt Frasier era, but he could've played, he could've played.

MN: Right, but now, this another question that follows from this-- What sort of food did people eat when you were growing up?

ND: Aw man, we had, we had the cheeseburgers, we had the hamburgers, we had the strudel cakes. On the dinner plate-- Thanksgiving-- you had the chitlins, you had the rice and the beans, you had the big turkeys, you had the big ham. You had a lot of vegetables, collard greens, turnips; spinach was one of the main courses that a lot of the moms would prepare.

MN: Could you smell the food in the hallways?

ND: Aw yea. All up and down the hallways, all up and down the hallways, that's right!

MN: Now, were most of the women in the families, this is again the 50's, in the labor force or, were they staying-- did they stay at home with the kids?

ND: Well, a lot of the women were in the labor force, but, but a lot of the women, they worked late hours, they worked in the afternoons in the evening hours. And they had, and they maintained domestic, domestic jobs.

MN: Oh, so a lot of the women were working as domestics?

ND: As domestics, that's right, cleaning office buildings or so.

MN: Ok, but not so much private homes?

ND: No, not so much private houses, but cleaning office buildings.

MN: Ok, so they were part of an office work force?

ND: Right, right.

MN: Now, in their absence, who took care of the kids? Were there daycare arrangements or did families help each other out?

ND: Families helped each other out. There was, there was a day care center attached to our building, 414 Morris Avenue. But I, I can't remember any of the kids that I had basically grew up with, 414 around the Patterson, that actually used the daycare. I think there were a lot of kids coming up from different areas that were using the daycare center. But it was almost like a, a community rule that people would watch out for one another. And the majority of the times, most of the times, when kids were young, 3-4, years old, they would stay right around in the immediate area and the moms and the pops would be on the benches watching everybody. Everybody'd be outside, running or playing stickball jumping rope or what-have-you. But there was always a watchful eye on the youngsters in the neighborhood.

MN: Now how important was the underground economy in the Patterson Houses? When we had spoken last time you mentioned numbers.

ND: Ok, yea. The underground economy, it was very important. Because when people got extra money in their hands, at that particular time, a lot of your commodities they weren't as expensive as they are now. Of they hit $500 or $600, they'd go out buy-- purchase a car, purchase an automobile. And the numbers, especially the numbers, was totally respected. One of the numbers runners in the neighborhood was and I hope you don't mind me mentioning his name, was, was, Mr. Clay. And Mr. Clay, he could at times take numbers, remember them-- cause he had favorite, favorite customers he would work for one side of the Patterson to the other. And I never seen him writing anything, write anything down. Cause he would remember in his mind exactly what numbers his customers played and he could remember them in the combination. In

other words, if you had to play you know 1, 140, 143, and you'd get a 20 cent combination on that, you know 20/30, he would remember 143, 20/30.

MN: Well, Malcolm X said that some of these numbers runners were like math geniuses in terms of what they could remember.

ND: Oh, absolutely. That was their business-- that was their job.

MN: Now did a lot of people you knew play the numbers?

ND: Yes, basically the entire projects; most of the adults. Because, they would play for a nickel, for a number or they would play for a dime, play for a dime, or they would play a number a dollar or so. But they would play a series of numbers, so it would total out to maybe $3, $4, $5, $10 for that particular day if you will. If you were, some people were lucky-- It was just traditional, if you saw Mr. Clay you would walk up to him and say, "look, give me so-and-so and so-and-so for 50 cents or a dollar, 50 cents combo" whatever, whatever. But the majority of the people in the projects, cause he had a lot of customers and you could tell that he had a lot of customers because we'd see Mr. Clay coming down the walkway; his pants would always be full of coins, he'd be jingling, jingly, jingly, jingly, jingly, you know what I'm saying, so he always had a lot of money. And he was also a big donor in the church and also towards our softball team.

MN: OK, so this was a community benefactor. Now, one of the amazing things to me is that he didn't have to worry about getting robbed.

ND: No, no, no not at all. And, and because he was well respected, he was considered a bank; even though he wasn't a banker they knew he was the man with the money. And they knew, they knew he had to have some kind of banking behind him and people would sometimes, at points in time, when we were growing up as kids, we did see who he was associated with. We

did see who his main people were because they had come to his house on several occasions. During Mother's Day or around Memorial Day, you know, to just like come in and say hello to him. So as kids we saw the folks he was basically dealing with and they weren't African American.

MN: Now that raises an interesting question. If people needed to borrow money who would they go to?

ND: Oh, they would go, they would go to Mr. Clay, but they also had the loan sharks out there too, but a lot of people tried to stay away from the loan sharks. And they would go to the neighbor-to-neighbor, borrowing money or if there was a short fall on sugar, they would go to a neighbor's door and get some sugar, or if there was a short fall on flour or milk, whoever had it. It was basically a sharing community; when you talk about democratic socialism, I think that there was a good model that one could see.

MN: Now, were the loan sharks African American?

ND: The loan sharks were African American, yes they were. They were African American, they were hustlers; they had on big wing tip shoes, big pants and so. And a lot of people, you basically tried to stay away from them.

MN: Now, did they own stores? How did you find them?

ND: Well, they were an intricate part of the community; people knew who they were because they kind of stuck out. They stuck out like a sore thumb because of their style of dress; they had wing-tip shoes, the big, big bellbottom pants and stuff, the bly knits, the big fancy cars, if you will. And they were involved in a lot of different businesses, just not loan sharking, but they were also involved in like pimping and, we didn't know anything about drugs at that particular time, but maybe, they might have been.

MN: Now, you talk about pimping. Where was that pimping activity, was that taking place near the projects or were there particular spots in the Bronx where they, where you had prostitution?

ND: Totally, everything-- I never seen anything in the Bronx. From my understanding, everything was down in Manhattan, down in the Harlem area.

MN: Ok, so they made their money there and then they did this part of the business you know, up here. Now, you know, again Vicki suggested that when you were, when you first moved to Patterson that it was a very safe place. What kept it a very safe place?

ND: Well, I think everyone was basically concerned about the fact that we basically just moved into a new development, so people took pride. They took pride in keeping the neighborhood safe from crime, free from outsiders, because outsiders could not come into the Patterson Projects if we didn't know them. You had a lot of the older guys they would question anybody who didn't look right who came into the projects late in the evening, especially during the summer hours. If you were just roaming around in the projects you had the older guys like B.B. Graham, and Finy, and Wilder, and Eddie Gaylord, and Leroy, and John, what's John's-- come on John-- Boise's brother ok. They were basically patrolling, they were just like patrolling the neighborhood. When I say patrolling the neighborhood, they didn't take on a job as, as, as patrollers of the neighborhood, they would just basically walk around the neighborhood just to take a walk and making sure things was ok.

MN: Ok, now just to switch gears a little bit. What was your experience in school when you were growing up? What were the teachers like and the atmosphere? Did you find it a supportive environment in the elementary schools and junior highs?

ND: Oh yea, I mean when you, when you came to school especially like the first day, moms, everybody, everybody from the projects, mothers would bring the kids to school because we had

to line up in the school yard, PS 18, before we actually went in. You know, this was from like elementary, this was from 1st graders up to 6th graders, we all had to line up outside before we actually went in. And it was a very, very supportive educational system at that time because if I remember correctly, I had several teachers at that time who were, who were, who, you know, took an interest in your reading and writing skills. And if you were, you know, a slow learner, they would take you from, from, from the traditional class and they would put you in what’s known as remediation class.

MN: Right.

ND: I had to go into remediation class because I didn’t like to say anything; I didn’t like to talk so they just thought I was a slow learner if you will. I might have been in some areas, but I loved the small classroom, there was maybe six of us in the classroom, so by the time I went back to regular class, I was reading about two grades beyond my original class and the teachers were very surprised. But as everybody know at that particular time, I didn’t like to say anything, I didn’t like to speak; but now it’s a different color, now people have a hard time telling me to keep quiet! [Laughs]

MN: Right. Now, when you say the teachers took an interest in you was this true of White teachers and Black teachers?

ND: Yea, I think that there was a lot of, if I’m not mistaken, there were a lot of Irish teachers in the school system at that particular time. And they taught-- if you didn’t particularly understand something, they took their time to go over the work with you. They were very supportive, they weren’t denigrating, they weren’t denigrating if you didn’t understand anything. They would do their best to basically help you try to understand. They would call your moms in if you were having any real serious academic problems and let you know where you’d need to strengthen

your skills at and what they were going to do to help you reach that there level. So, it was a very, very, supportive, supportive educational system. And also, if I remember correctly, elementary school, I don't remember-- there weren't too many. I don't remember to many African American teachers, not in elementary school. But, when we got to the junior high school level, Clark Junior High School, it changed up. You had Mr. James Wilson, who became superintendent; you had Mr. Eddie Bonamere, who was a music teacher; you had Mr. Taylor, who was a music teacher; you had Mr. John Crawford who was there. A number of teachers, a number of teachers who were African American were in Clark Junior High School.

MN: And how far was Clark Junior High from the Patterson?

ND: Right down the street. We weren't bussed; we were fortunate kids, we were not bussed. PS 18 was one way and Clark was the other way.

MN: Wow, Now do you remember any particular teachers who played a very important role in your life as mentors?

ND: Oh yes, yes. I think one of the-- you know, my science teacher, Mr. Wilson. Because Mr. Wilson, he was very hard-nosed; Mr. Wilson did not like to smile, he did it very rarely. I saw him smile after I came home from college and he was the superintendent in Community School District 7; someone had said a joke while we were in the district office and he kinda burst out laughing. And I walked over to him and I said, I said to him, "Mr. Wilson, all these years you've been my teachers, and all these years I've known you, I've never seen you crack a smile until today." And he says, "Well, I very rarely smile, I'm, I'm very, very serious." Well he's always maintained that serious front. So Mr. Wilson played a very instrumental part in my-- because he always presented himself as a man of integrity and as a man that was very serious. Mr. Bonamere, Eddie Bonamere you know, love of my life, you know, great pianist, jazz pianist is a

Bos, Bos, Bon, Bonamere if you will. He would play; he would have a concert in PS 18's park at the end of the summer, every summer. And he would have like Willie Bobo, the famous timbale player he would have his jazz folks out there. And everyone, everyone at the close of the summer programs at PS 18, the entire projects, and I mean the entire projects would be in the schoolyard to hear Mr. Bonamere close down for the summer if you will, before we would start the new school year. But Eddie Bonamere was a very important figure in my life. And the reason why he was so important, so important to me was because I studied music; I studied voice, and also the trumpet, and now I'm back on the piano. Now, the reason I say I'm back on the piano is because I started at a very, very young age in elementary school, but I stopped. But right now, I'm back on the piano; I'm starting to pick up some jazz licks, some jazz licks on the keyboard again.

MN: Now, was, was there a lot of music in the schools?

ND: Oh, yea. Oh, yea, I mean absolutely. Mr. Bonamere, we played in the band, a lot of folks that came into Clark Junior High School wanted to be in the band. Once you made the band you had to be at school, 7 o'clock in the morning.

MN: Now did they give you the instruments?

ND: Yes. You could take the instruments home.

MN: Oh my god!

ND: You could take the instruments home over the weekend, or, or, or during the school week. And you'd sign out for it if you wanted to take it during the course of the school week, during the day in the school week, and you would just bring it back. Especially over the weekends you would sign out, you could take your trumpet; you could take your saxophone home over the weekends and bring it back early Monday morning at 7 o'clock. Yea, there was

that sort of trust system because no one was interested in stealing anything because this belonged to you; the instruments belonged to you.

MN: Wow, talk about-- another thing democratic socialism.

ND: Another democratic socialism, absolutely correct.

MN: Now, what did you have, after school centers and night centers at the-- that you went to?

ND: Yes we did. And one of the driving forces in the afternoon and evening community center was Mr. Floyd Lane, he was one. Ray Felix--

MN: Ray Felix?

ND: Yes, Ray Felix was working in the community center with Floyd Lane. We, we saw a lot of famous people because of Floyd Lane and what he had accomplished as a basketball player from Franklin to City College. And our community centers were very rarely closed. If it was, a Christmas holiday it would close for Christmas, it'd be open the next day. And Floyd would give the holiday basketball tournaments, where he would invite a lot of people, a lot of different basketball players from the pro, from the pro-ranks, from the pro-ranks to the amateur ranks if you will. So we got an opportunity to see great basketball players like Mellow Lock Lemon, Happy Harrison, guys who were-- Names I could mention right now, I don't know if you might know them in terms of the pro-ranks, but Tom Thacker, Tony Yates come there. You had, you had Big Tom Hoover, that's one of my big favorites; he always called me 'little man'.

MN: Now was this, was this in the school, in PS 18?

ND: Yes, it was in PS 18. And surprisingly it's a very small court. They says it's regulated, it's a regulation court, but I don't think so but they had great, great, games, great games. Especially during the Easter holiday when Floyd used to run the Easter holiday tournaments and so. You'd have games starting at 12 o'clock in the afternoon and running through almost 10 o'clock in the

evening. So we had an opportunity to look at basketball being played from different levels, from different levels. You know one level, one level-- One of my favorite ball players and I picked up a lot from him, was Ronnie Jackson. Ron Jackson, a great ball player, a wizard, could run the break I think better than anybody. Secondly, was also Pablo Robertson.

MN: Oh yea.

ND: Pab-- from Clinton, oh, unbelievable. I was fortunate enough to play with his brother when I played at DeWitt Clinton, I played with Walter Robertson. A fantastic ball player; just died at a very young age of colon cancer you know. Also, you had Nellie Bertram. He was Latino, Hispanic and boy, could he play. He played with Morris High School. He was a wizard with the basketball, he was on the baddest point guards in New York City, and everybody, everybody knew that. And then you had Eddie Gaylord. Eddie Gaylord was, was, was a wiz with the basketball. The Harlem Globetrotters wanted Eddie at the age of 14 years old; he was fantastic, fantastic.

MN: Now, now how old were you when you started playing basketball?

ND: Oh, 8,9-- 8,9,10; when I was about 8 or 9.

MN: Now when you started were you mostly playing in pick up games or supervised leagues?

ND: No, we started, we'd basically have our own little basketballs and we would choose up among ourselves. And we were little guys trying to reach, trying to reach the big baskets. So what we did as opposed to playing on the major courts, on the side court there was a very small basket and we could take, we could touch the rim, we could throw it in and dunk it. And we had a good time until we got a little stronger, we grew a little bigger, and sometimes the big guys would, they would be missing one guy or two guys and they tell you to come on over to play. So

that's when you graduated, you graduated. It was time for you to hone your skills now, because they knew, they taught you enough where you could come and play in full court game with them.

MN: Right, right, now how old were you when you first started playing outside of the Patterson Houses?

ND: 14, 15. What I did, I was playing with Floyd and them at PS 18 then I got a little disenchanted. The reason why I got disenchanted was, you had so many great ball players in the Patterson and you wouldn't really get an opportunity to play if you played on organized teams; especially PS 18, they had different, different, age groups. So what I did, I went back up into the Prospect Avenue area and I played with Hilton White, it was called the Falcons.

MN: Hilton White is what? It's a community center?

ND: Hilton White was a, was a park employee, he was a director of recreation at 120 Park. And a lot of ball players went through Hilton White.

MN: Now, when you say 120 Park, what is, where is-- that's an outdoor--?

ND: Yes, near Cauldwell Avenue, it's an outdoor park, right. Right around, right off of Prospect Avenue, Cauldwell, Prospect Avenue. And there, there he had tryouts for the Falcons and he had different groups, he had different groups. But you couldn't try out for the Falcons unless, and he would say this to you, unless you were going to college. You could not try out for the Falcons unless you had ambitions to go to college because all of his ball players, all of them, went to college. And those were his ball players that beat Kentucky that beat Pat Riley. Texas Western against Kentucky; those were Hilton White's ball players. Willie Worsley, Nevil Shed, Cager, if you will. Those were Hilton White's ball players that went from, from 120 Park to Morris High School to DeWitt Clinton to Texas Western to National Championship.

MN: Wow. So you had these mentors that sports was not just about sports, it was about people trying to get you a better life.

ND: Oh yea, to enhance your lifestyle. Cause this was, basketball was basically, it was the major sport coming out of the African American community at that particular time. And a lot of the ballplayers, they knew each other. So when you left the basketball court and you went to different, different, other developments, housing developments, the ballplayers would know, so it was basically safe. They knew you were not coming into the different projects, housing developments, to start any trouble but to just to maybe to come to play a pickup game; like St. Mary's would go down to the Lincoln Projects. So they know who you basically were or so-- And we enjoyed ourselves, we basically enjoyed ourselves in terms of playing around and doing a lot of-- having a lot of pick up games and also shooting around, doing 5-10, and around the world.

MN: Now, now were there gangs in the Bronx in the 50's?

ND: Yea, there were a lot of gangs, lot of gangs. I think that was socially, that was socially accepted. Because the gang, the gangs-- one thing that was unique about a lot of the gangs during that particular era-- a lot of them were your doo-wop singers. You know with the sweaters, with the sweaters, green and white, purple and white, yellow, yellow and gold if you will, yellow and white if you will, red and black; a lot of them were the doo-wop singers. And they had beautiful, beautiful, beautiful sweaters, beautiful jackets at that particular time. And during that era, they would never actually really fight with any guns or anything like that but it got to a point where there were a few stabbings, a few knifings with any have you. And then you became larger in the gang if you had a BB gun, if you had a BB gun. And then as they got older, then you would have some shots fired from .22's or .38's or so. But during the, during the,

during the advent towards me remembering or so, a lot of the gangs, they would wear their sweaters, their colors or so, and they would, they would be receptive towards other gangs as long as it wasn't a territorial thing, ok. One of the most hated gangs in the Bronx was the Fordham Baldies. And we were outside one evening and they walked the Patterson, and I mean, there was about 40 of them on a Friday night, 40 of them! They were coming, they were looking for the Young Gents. The Young Gents, who lived on the other side of the projects, thank God! You know what I'm saying!? And from my understanding, I think maybe on or two people might have gotten hurt that evening. Not from the Patterson, but from the Fordham Baldies; and these were African American gangs too.

MN: The Baldies were African Americans too?

ND: Oh yes; they were all African American gangs, that's right.

MN: Now--

ND: The Suicides were like mostly Latino; they were like around the same, the same area the Suicides.

MN: Now, was there fighting between kids in different projects or was that not really a big issue?

ND: It was, it was an issue for a while, Melrose, Melrose, Melrose Projects and Patterson Projects. Melrose is straight down Morris Avenue, its not too, not too distant from the Patterson. There was always friction between the Patterson and Melrose, but as, as, as everybody got older, they saw how dumb it was. I mean they would stop each other in the streets and beat up on each other and break each other down for no reason. I guess that was just young hostility. And it was also protecting your territory because you belonged in the Patterson, stayed in the Patterson, if you were coming in the Melrose, stay in the Melrose. But I never had

any problems because I knew Kenny Jackson, who was a good friend of mine. And Kenny had no problems because we played on Clinton's basketball team together. And Kenny lived in the Melrose and me being from the Patterson, I could go to the Melrose and they knew who I was, "Oh, ballplayers".

MN: So in other words, if you were a ballplayer you had a free pass?

ND: If you were a ballplayer you had a free pass throughout New York City, nothing would ever happen to you, right.

MN: Right, that's interesting. What were the relationships like with the Puerto Rican kids and the Black kids when you were growing up? Was-- did they kind of keep to themselves, or did friendships kind of cross those lines?

ND: They were basically our buddies, man; we were like friends with Julio Perez and Robert Rodriguez. Robert Rodriguez taught me how to tie a tie. And he later on became executive director of Lincoln Hospital. I got my first job with Robert Rodriguez at Robert Hall along Third Avenue. He showed me how to fold suits, fold pants; oh yea, oh yea, oh yea.

MN: So, the relationships were pretty-- pretty good?

ND: Pretty good. You had Frankie Burgos who was a very good friend, very good friend, he died recently. You had Nellie Bertram and his family-- And the majority of them, the majority of them Latino guys, their relationships were basically with African American women.

MN: So there was a lot of intermarriage, interracial dating?

ND: Lots of intermarriage, lot of, lot of dating, and nothing was ever said, there was no friction. There were no names ever being called against or amongst one another until you actually left the projects. And if you went down to St. Mary's then that's where you would have your friction, because you had the Suicides down there and those were the Latino guys and they

didn't want to see no blacks coming in their neighborhood. And if you went down that neighborhood at night, you would really be in trouble; they would beat up on you, bad.

MN: Now did you grow up, listening to Latin music and dancing to it?

ND: That was the main thing. For some strange reason, Latin wasn't called salsa at the time, it was called Latin, Latin music. It hit a lot of, it hit the New York scene like it was a phenomenon. You know everybody was Latin-ing, but then, what they would do at night time, they would do the parties, they would do the grind-em-ups with the slow music or so, with the Temptations and the Four Tops, what have you. But Latin was a very big thing--Eddie Palmieri, with Cocko, with Joe Bataan if you will. It was a very, very, very, very big thing at that particular time.

MN: Now what was the musical culture like in the Patterson houses? Was music-- did you hear it in the hallways, was it part of people's lives?

ND: Oh yea, you had Bobo Johnson and James Johnson they had their doo-wop, they had their doo-wop groups. And what happened was that kind of stimulated us to form our own little, our own little doo-wop group cause we were learning from them and listening from them and listen to where they harmonized and they would teach us how to do harmony and stuff like that. But you know in our particular project you would see Louie Lymon, Frankie Lymon's brother come down, you'd even see Frankie Lymon in our project you would see Louie Lymon, Frankie Lymon's brother come down, you'd even see Frankie Lymon in our project at the time because they knew James Johnson and Bobo Johnson and Little Mickey, Little Mickey the Bass, and Leon, and Leon-- When they had their groups, when they were doing their little doo-wops in the hallway or in the summertime, especially in the summertime, they would always get a big crowd

cause they would do like Little Anthony tunes and they would also do Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers tunes--

MN: So you had people singing in the hallways, singing outside?

ND: Yea, it was always, you had like-- you had Hector, he would be across the street from the Patterson, he would be across the street with his conga drums. He would start at 5 o'clock and he wouldn't finish till maybe 2:30 in the morning. And as I got older I realized what he was doing was basically just giving signals, letting people know what all was well in the village. That's what the conga drums were for, to let people know that all was well.

MN: Now, you'd mentioned somebody, a piano player named Barry Rogers from-- who was a pianist for Mongo Santamaria--

ND: Yea, oh yea. Barry Rogers lived in the Patterson, he was Mongo's piano player on a lot of his albums or so and he lived across, I think it was 271, right across the lawn from the Patterson Projects. And you could hear Barry, you could hear Barry practicing a lot because he was on the second floor. Windows would always be open especially on a good, nice, hot summer day. And on several times, we'd see Mongo. Mongo come over to come into the projects and go up into the building and maybe do a few tunes with Barry. We'd hear, Mongo up there [Sings]-- So that was exciting. We also had, Gilbert, a young Latino guy, his father did the big band thing, the big Latin band thing. And surprisingly, Gilbert was very nice on the keyboard, he was very nice on the piano, and he formed his own little band. And then was very nice on the keyboard, he was very nice on the piano, and he formed his own little band. And then there was the exception to the rule. The exception to the rule is Freddy Dupree Sayeed, who plays jazz nice, has been playing now for like 40 years and he is great on keyboard. He grew up in the building where Barry Rogers lived, but there was no relationship, he didn't know him. Because at the time

Freddy Dupree Sayeed played the violin in the band that we were in Clark Junior-High School that was being taught by and conducted by Mr. Eddie Bonamere. But he made the transition because he wanted to play piano, and today, he can play.

MN: Ok. How important was religion in the Patterson Houses?

ND: Religion was very important. I believe it was either Tuesdays or Thursdays that they had, they would let us out of school early and it was called religious days--

MN: Religious instruction?

ND: Religious instruction and you had to go to your church. And we enjoyed going to our church on Willis Avenue, you know the Willis Avenue Methodist Church because we had Reverend Brooks there. Reverend Brooks when he first started working at the Willis Avenue Methodist Church, what he did, he walked through the projects, he told people who he was, he did his public relations, he gave out his card and got people to come to the church on that there Saturday or Sunday, and he beautified the church and we used to have jobs. Summer Youth Employment jobs, we worked in the church-- But religion was very important because I remember, I remember going to Bible study school early in the morning and I remember going to church service, regular church service at 11 o'clock and we also sang in the choir. Then I remember coming back in the evenings, for special programs in the church, 6 o'clock in the evening for the special programs.

MN: Now was this Methodist Church a pretty much an all African American church?

ND: Yes, pretty much so, pretty much so, yes.

MN: Were any of your friends Catholics?

ND: Yea, not a lot though. You had Tito LaSalle, who played at Rice High School with Dean Memminger, he was basically Catholic and I think and one more person, I think Eric Brown, I

think Eric Brown was also Catholic because he played, he played with Kareem at Powell Memorial, and he was from the Patterson too, and could jump. He was a very, very, very high jumper.

MN: Now, were there any people in the Nation of Islam when you were growing up? Were there any people who were Muslims who were in the Patterson in the early years?

ND: Yes, Mr. Levi. Mr. Levi's store was right across the street from the elementary school, and he was very, very subtly, but he was Muslim, he was a practicing Muslim, if you will.

MN: Was he a, a Nation of Islam Muslim or a Muslim like, a Sunni or a--?

ND: A Nation of Islam Muslin, Nation of Islam-- Beyond the candy store and we used to enjoy going over there early in the morning and late in the afternoons or so and get a, buy his hamburgers with smothered onion or the cheeseburgers with smothered onions. Boy that was so good, it was so good.

MN: Now it seems like when you were growing up, you had many adult mentors. Where did they come from? I was thinking like family, school, church; were there other adults that took an interest in you, other than those areas?

ND: All over. You had, Mr. Russell, who was a Burns' Guards employee and he was a, he was the coach, he was the coach of our softball team, the Patterson Knights. And he took a very special interest in us because he worked in the evenings, so we had the opportunity, he had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with us, especially his son, played on our team too, Minor Russell. He spent a lot of time with us, putting in a lot of time with us and also traveling with us if we had outside games or so, making sure that we would do right. And it would also be part of his supervision, watching us and making sure that nothing would happen to us, especially if we

had to play teams that were either sore losers or what-have-you, didn't want us to get in any fights. But we very rarely got into any real fistfights with any of the opposing teams.

MN: Now, where did the, where did the--

[END OF SIDE A, BEGINNING OF SIDE B]

MN: --the Knights played. So you were saying you traveled all over the city?

ND: Yea, we basically stayed in the Bronx. And we would play in different tournaments in the, in the, in the afternoon, in the afternoons.

[Inaudible]

MN: Ok, ok, now one other question is, do you-- were there a lot of dances at school, dances when you were growing up, or church dances or community center dances?

ND: Not too, not too many churches or, or community center dances but what happened was Mr. Bonamere and them would maybe put out the record machine. And they would play, they would play a lot of Latin music and people right in the community center, if they felt like, you know, juts dancing and going over and spinning a girl, let them now how good they were. And one of the guys, one of the guys who could really dance Latin was Harold Kitt, better known as Funny and he was given his name by the McCullough brothers; I think they have since, expired. But because they say, "Oh, look he, he dances funny, he plays basketball funny," so they gave him the name of Funny. Another guy who could really dance was Larry Watkins, he's also expired too, but Larry, Larry could really Latin, if-you-will.

MN: Now, this is switching gears a little bit, you're describing this almost idyllic environment, how aware were you of racism when you were growing up?

ND: I wasn't aware of it at all. You know we, we didn't deal with that; we didn't understand it and we didn't know anything about it. You know we had Larry Arlino who lived in the

Patterson, he was, he was Italian and Larry played softball with us, he went with, I forget her name, but it'll come to me, but he also had a, he had a Black girlfriend. And we also had Larry Arlino and them, they used to spend a lot of time with, with Clarence Williams III, they played a lot of football together. So when you talk about racism and whether or not it existed it might have existed but we, we didn't see it; we didn't see it until, I didn't see it until I went to DeWitt Clinton High School.

MN: So it was when you went to Clinton that you really began to really become, encounter it personally?

ND: Right, because what had happened was we were coming into DeWitt Clinton High School, from the South Bronx and we had a, we had a dress style. We wore, we wore blue dungarees, you know, with converse sneakers. Up in that particular area, up on the Moshulu Parkway, you had a lot of the Jewish students, a lot of the Jewish, Polish, a lot of the immigrants were in that area at that particular time, they wore the black, the black dungarees. So the principle at the time was Mr. Walter Degman, and he had held a special assembly and said that, that, that you couldn't wear blue dungarees but you could wear the black dungarees. So we had a major protest where all the news media and everybody came I think, and he kind of watered it down, he says, "It's ok to wear blue dungarees as long as they're clean."

MN: Right, now were you aware of the Civil Rights Movement in the South? Was that something that you know, you were aware of, these big events, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Little Rock- Was this something you were aware of or was this something off the radar screen?

ND: No, my dad used to watch the news everyday. I mean him-- that was a regular for him everyday. And he watched it faithfully and he would comment about the racism that was going

on in Montgomery and all during the Southern states because he was from the South, and he basically farmed. So with all the lynching and what-have-you, I think what, what saved, what saved them was, because they were protected because they were on the farm. My granddaddy, both my granddaddies, had their own farms--

MN: So they owned their own land?

ND: Yes, their own land, yes.

MN: Now, did they every talk about what it was like in the South to you? Or that wasn’t that big subject they wanted to shield you from that?

ND: Well, they, they didn’t have to say, they didn’t have to say much because at, at certain times, when you were watching the news, just gaping or catching things out of the corner of your eyes, you could hear, “oh, two or three blacks were lynched in the South today, boom, boom de na na na.” Or in the newspaper you would have, “Jim Crow Law, ba, ba ba bing bing.” So it was something that we started to basically, to pick up as we became closer and closer to graduate seniors at DeWitt Clinton High School.

MN: New, somewhere along the line, the Patterson Houses began to change and become more dangers, when is your-- did you begin to become aware that something was wrong?

ND: That was during the, that was during the, the Civil Rights Movement. When Martin Luther King was going to Montgomery, Alabama, things started to change, I think. Cause what had happened was, the government, the government saw that a lot of people were kind of getting tired of getting bounced around, getting kicked around. So, so as most people I think, when you study the Civil Rights Movement, as you can see, a lot of it was fizzled down when they threw the heroin into the communities, especially a lot of the black communities and in particular in the housing developments.

MN: So you, it was heroin--? The, the first signs of real-- you know, negative change were associated with heroin?

ND: Yea, it was really a, really a negative change. Because a lot of the guys in my peer group they started, they started using. They were doing what was known as 'skin popping' whatever that meant, never knew what that means, then they went to 'mainlining' you know, in other words, really putting the needles in their veins and so.

MN: So there were guys you grew up with?

ND: These were guys I grew up with, right.

MN: Now, is there anything different between the people who did it and the people who didn't? You know, because it seems like there were a lot of people in Patterson who got out of there and became successful, What, what, what-- how did you distinguish between the people who did use and the people who didn't?

ND: Well, the people who didn't, they kept to their selves and they were always talking about, about sociology, about politics you know, about, about anthropology, you know. You had Bill Henry, who was a genius who worked at Bristol Meyers Squibb, you know, I used to be around those guys. You know, you had Cecil Joseph, who also became the, the president of the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation also the Borough President for a short time if you will, and the Commissioner of Appeals and Standards and how he owns several McDonalds up in the South Bronx or so. I tried to stay with that particular group because, because they maintained being kids. The other guys, who basically started to want to hang out, you could see that there was change not only in their attitudes about, about community, but they started to dress differently. They started to wear $125 shoes; tailor made silk pants, bly, bly silk knits. So, so,

so they were walking down the street you know, easily wearing a thousand dollars, you know what I'm saying? Easily.

MN: Now, did--

ND: In clothes--

MN: Yes. Now, did anything happen to families in the 60's also? Were people you know, were families beginning to crack?

ND: Devastated. You know because what happened was those people that you thought would not become involved in narcotics became involved in narcotics on a very heavy level. Cause there was just an abundance; it came from out of nowhere. But the sports figures, the basketball figures, they were basically isolated. But then, then somehow it started to reach into the basketball culture because they found out that, that in fact this was, this was easy picking because it was already a made market. You had a gentleman and who, I think, he changed his life; he's picked up his life-- Pee Wee Kirkland, from in Harlem. You know, and it was like an abundance you know, and a lot of families you know, a lot of families were destroyed. A lot of people didn't get an opportunity to you know, to live past 25, 26 years old. Because heroin was at an abundance, I mean pure heroin, and this was the quell to stop the Civil Rights Movement and also to stop people from becoming conscious of their surroundings and the changing, the changes that were being, taking places in the projects, their surrounding. So they wanted to take people, just drug 'em up and they did a pretty good job.

MN: Now, now what year did you graduate from Clinton?

ND: I graduated from Clinton in 1965.

MN: Was-- were there drugs already there by the time you graduated or was it a little later?

ND: They were there. And disturbingly, when I was down South in 1966, my moms gave me a call and she said that one of my best friends had just gotten, had just gotten shot. And I said, "What happened?" Well, so-and-so's jewelry store robbery. And I knew at that particular time, when I was in Clinton that somehow the drug culture grabbed him. And he was no longer speaking to me, I guess because I made, DeWitt Clinton's basketball team and it was the height of the, you know, the high, the epitome of sports at that particular-- if you could make DeWitt Clinton's basketball team. And he was a good friend of mine, I don't want to mention his name because you know I, I love him so much. And when mommy told me that he was gone, you know, that we was shot while in the act of attempting to rob a jewelry store, just devastated me. It just devastated me, devastated me. But I do know, I do know, and just in terms of me remembering him, and coming to the houses and every morning pick me up and we'd go walk up the Grand Concourse together, I do know that he was not that way. I do know that the narcotics and drugs would make you change your behavior, and that's what happened.

MN: Was there any sense that the jobs that the fathers were working on in the 50's were starting to disappear.

ND: Yea, a lot of that was happening.

MN: Was that another part of the story?

ND: Yea, another part of the story. A lot of, a lot of black men were starting to lose their jobs and the unemployment factor became, it became a little serious. So you had a lot of fathers who walked away from their families.

MN: And that started to happen when?

ND: That started to happen, '64, '63, '64.

MN: So the fathers were starting to walk away?

ND: Starting to walk away from the families.

MN: And what do you think was making that happen?

ND: They couldn't find work number one, and the pressures were too great in terms of raising a lot of kids.

MN: So the mothers started to be left alone?

ND: They started to be left alone and some families they started to have to go onto public assistance. Bit it was still, it was still a known fact that anybody who lived in the, in the Patterson was a part of, was a part of that family.

MN: Now, when did that family atmosphere start to end, to the point where you felt you couldn't trust your neighbors?

ND: About, about the summer of '65. About the summer of '65, that was when people were basically starting to leave and move out, you know.

MN: And you began to see people talking, "I gotta get out of here?"

ND: Gotta get-- believe it I'm getting out of here. This one is on, this one is over here, this one is doing this, this doing that-- I know we moved out, I think we moved out about '65, '66.

MN: And where did you, where did you move to?

ND: Moved up into the Northeast Bronx.

MN: And when you say the Northeast Bronx, that's Wakefield?

ND: Yes, that's Wakefield/Baychester.

MN: Ok, what street did you move to?

ND: WE moved on Hammersley and Gunther Avenue and at that time it was an underdeveloped area; it was just mud, mud dirt roads, not that many houses. You could hear the roosters in the morning waking you up, there were cows up there, there were horses up there--

MN: You're kidding!

ND: People were afraid to come up there because they actually called it 'the country'. And there was no Co-op at the time, no Co-Op City.

MN: Right, so people, people moved there because it was safe?

ND: People moved there because it was so safe, it was quiet, and it was away from everything. And I asked my dad, I said, "Dad, why we moved way up here. This is country, ain't nothing up here, there's nobody up here", so.

MN: Wow, so you got out in '66. And at that time you were in college in South Carolina?

ND: Yes, I was at Benedict College.

MN: Now is, this is very interesting because it seems like a lot of African American students in the 60's ended up going to college in the South.

ND: Right.

MN: Were you-- who encouraged you to go that route?

ND: Hilton White. Playing with the Falcons he had went to Benedict--

MN: Oh, Bene-- it's Benedict?

ND: Yes, it's Benedict. He had went to Benedict; he had graduated from Benedict so he encouraged me. He says, "Listen, I'm going to send you to my alma mater." So we went down-- the coach came up, John Brown came up, met him on Prospect Avenue and that's all she wrote. And we went down, me and Frank Burch, we went down the latter part of August-- Boy! It was hot! And I don't re-- and I said to myself, "Oh my God!" You know, I didn't realize it was this hot in Columbia. Because when I was a youngster we always used to go back to my granddaddy's farm and tie tobacco you know, feed the pigs you know, ride in the wagon, but this particular time, this particular part of August when we had to be down there as freshman

before September, before the month of September-- Then, the football team, they would work out almost like 5 o'clock in the morning because it was just to darn hot by 11, 12 o'clock to work out. And then they would have another practice, they would have another practice like maybe late in the afternoon or so.

MN: So this was in Columbia, South Carolina?

ND: Yes, this was in Columbia, South Carolina.

MN: So the same town or city as University of South Carolina?

ND: Yes, yes that's correct.

MN: Now in those days University of South Carolina was a segregated institution?

ND: Yes, it was a segregated institution. We couldn't go on their university to play against, to do a pick up game against the basketball team, the game cod from? But we always welcomed them to come to our gym.

MN: So they came and played?

ND: Yes, they came and played in our gym. You know always good pick up games you know, four court games.

MN: That's interesting. So everybody knew each other?

ND: Everyone knew each other. And when the came to Benedict, you know to get a workout they always had a good run. And they were welcome with open arms; they knew there would be no trouble. But you know if you tried to go onto University of South Carolina, they would arrest you!

MN: Now, let me see if there's anything-- What was your basketball experience like in high school? What was it like, for playing at Clinton?

ND: Wow, oh god, I remember my first year there man, when Willie Worsley and Nelson Whitaker where there. And I tried out for the team or so-and-so and the basketball coach hank Jacobson, he said to me, "You know you're good." I said, "Thank you." He said, "We're having tryouts on Sunday; come back Sunday." So I says, "Ok," and well so I came back on Sunday and school was closed. This was his way, Hank Jacobson, of being very sarcastic when he didn't need you, you know, he tells you they're having practice on Sunday.

MN: Damn! So what year was that?

ND: Yes. That was my, that was my sophomore year at DeWitt Clinton--

MN: And when did you make the team?

ND: I made the team easily my senior year; I played on year at DeWitt Clinton High School. They reason why, was because, was because that summer I played in the World's Fair, New York against Philadelphia, and I shined. And the newspapers-- And we played up at Kutcher's we had an all-star team going all over the place, with Kareem and Mike Switzer, and Jim Tullman, and Corky Bell if you will. Oh, Corky, I love Corky, always there for your pastors if you will. And I played in the World's Fair, didn't, did really well. And that September when I walked into DeWitt Clinton High School there was a big article that was written up at the time, I think it was in the *Mirror* paper-- that they didn't know why-- Hank Jacobson-- I wasn't playing on Clinton's team for the last 3 years, because of my performance at the World's, in the World's Fair.

MN: So you made the team in your senior year and were you a starter?

ND: I wasn't a starter at the beginning, Kenny Jackson was starting or so, but after I worked my way up and that's all she wrote. They couldn't stop me at that particular point.

MN: Right. Now, did-- when did you start playing in the Rucker Tournament?

ND: I played in the Rucker Tournament when I came home from, when I graduated from Benedict. When I graduated from Benedict I played up in the Rucker Tournament; I played with the Bronx team, with Mousey and those guys, and Johnny Mathis, and Conga Mally, and Nevil Shed, you know, and we had a pretty good team, Dwayne Watkins you know, and we had a pretty good team.

MN: Now did, did you get a tryout with the NBA?

ND: No! I got a letter when my senior year in college from Kansas City, you know, cause, because 4 years before there was Bob McCullough. And Bob McCullough got a letter, he got a letter from, excuse me I got a letter from Cincinnati, and because Bob McCullough had tried out with Oscar; and Oscar was on a layout because he was asking for more money. But Bob did very well when he was working in the Cincinnati Royals Camp. But my senior year, I made, I made All-Conference and small college All-American, and I got a letter from the Cincinnati Royals. I wanted to play in Atlanta, but at that time you know, playing 4 years in school, I think I got a little tired, I was really tired.

MN: Now, do you think basketball helped you stay serious about school or was it a distraction?

ND: No, it, it, it helped me stay very serious about school because it was a culture. And it was a way, it was a way to release all your energies, you know, all your inhibitions because now it became, it became a scientific art once you knew the court. Once you had a good feel for your passes you had a good feel for your teammates it became a very scientific, it became an art, it became an art form if you will. And it kept us away from a lot of, all the other things that were going on. That was a protected, that was a protected culture, basketball culture was a highly protected culture because you know you had guys like Cecil Watkins, you had guys like John Crawford, you had guys like Floyd Lane or so, especially guys like Hilton White; when you

came to play, you came to play. And, and, and it was always a learning, it was always a learning process with them.

MN: Now, it seems like the Patterson houses produced a very large number of successful productive individuals, why do you think that was?

ND: Because we, we as kids we, we, we took school very serious. Everyone I know, everyone I know, everyone in my peer group, from elementary school to junior high school to high school-- everybody finished and got their high school diploma, if you will. And when I left the projects, I think I was one of the first ones to leave in our peer group, when I left, everybody says, “ Oh, Bubba Dukes is going to college.” Cause I wasn’t that great a student at DeWitt Clinton, and reason I wasn’t that great a student at DeWitt Clinton is because the school was academically sound. And coming from out of Clark Junior High School into an aca-- a very strong academic school, like DeWitt Clinton High School you know, a lot of, a lot of the Black students didn’t fair well-- but a lot of them did you know, And they graduated you know; when you were in DeWitt Clinton the main thing was to get your diploma. What helped me get my diploma was basketball because it made my serious about getting to classes, because you had to; you had to stay eligible if you were going to play.

MN: Now, did you grow up with a, a lot of books in your house?

ND: A lot of encyclopedias; there was a lot of encyclopedias. My mom was always set on having to keep encyclopedias in the house. And she was very, very conscious of the fact that I had to read, that I had to write and that I had to do my homework. And I think what broke her heart was when I went to DeWitt Clinton High School and she came up, I think it was my sophomore year, I believe it was the year that Kennedy was assassinated-- And she came up, it was like ’65-’66, and she came up to open school week and she spoke to one of my history

professors and he had said to her that I would never be college material, that I should go and take a trade up. So I think that hurt her real bad; I wish I could see him today.

MN: Oh, especially when you end up getting your doctorate!

ND: Oh, I wish that I could see him today!

MN: Now, you were close to the Archibalds--

ND: Oh yea, very close. Well, not only to the Archibalds but to everybody in our building. In the projects, we were very, very, very close; all families were close. In other words you didn't have to be with Tiny and Vicki to go see his moms, Miss Julia; I'd go and see Miss Julie on my own accord. She's say, "Oh, Bubba how you doing?" I'd say, "Miss Julie, you got any Kool-Aid?" And we'd sit down and we'd kick it you know, we'd have Kool-Aid. You know, many times Louie Reynolds and those guys, Lenny Gethers, they would be in my house when I came through the door, they'd be in my house cause they liked my mom's chocolate cake.

MN: Now, how did people talk to adults? You called them Mister and Miss?

ND: Oh yea, Mister and Miss was always with respect, always with respect and you could not, you couldn't denigrate, you couldn't talk back to any of the adults because they would also be able to, you know, put you in your place. When I say put you in your place, not so much in terms of hit you, they would never hit you, but they would just pull you, they would pull you by your arm until you, "Listen boy, straighten up. You heard what I tell you to do, go home." And you would have to you know, you would have to listen to those commands.

MN: Do you think that there was a different attitude of young people towards adults at that time then there is now?

ND: Yea, there is. You know, the adults in our neighborhood, they were highly visible especially like 5 o'clock, 6 o'clock, they would sit across the streets in the parks, Mr. Johnson,

my dad and them. You know and they could see my dad and them, they could see everything that's going on around them and they would always have like an eye on you, you know. So I remember one time I went over to PS 18 and I wasn't around the building. And I thought I was being smart and going over there with Lenny Gethers and them and we jumped up on the roof and we were just running back and fort and stuff like that and all of a sudden my father goes, "Bubba, come here!" And I say, "Oh lord!" Boy did I get a beating-- So there were always eyes, be it your parents or be it other adults in the neighborhood, they were always watching the kids.

MN: One of the things- so, your sense is that people started leaving in the mid 60's when your family left?

ND: Oh yes, yes, yes, people were getting out. Tommy Murphy, the Murphy family moved, they moved out, we moved out-- The Clinton family, Junie Clinton, they moved out then; Mr. Clay moved out. And a lot of people were going into, if they weren't going into college, they were going into the armed services, the Vietnam War, the Vietnam era.

MN: When did people start having Patterson reunions?

ND: I think it was-- Well the first one was developed by John Crawford and them, myself, and Marlene and them. And it was like a black shirt, black tie affair at the, at Allerton Henry.

MN: Now, what year was this?

ND: That was back at, I believe it was '91, '91, '92.

MN: So in other words this started when you guys were in your 40's?

ND: Yes, right, right.

MN: Now, what made you decide to do it? Was it-- it's a-- this whole reunion phenomenon is to me one of the most interesting unknown aspects of this South Bronx culture and history.

ND: Well, because of the camaraderie, the closeness that we had with each other as kids; because we used to run track together, we played softball together we played softball against outside teams in PS 18 park. You'd have the whole projects in the park supporting the games in the evenings or so if you will. Again, we ran track, we played basketball together, we did music together, you know. We cried together, we laughed together, we went to school together, we kept each other academically sound. If there was a short fall, if somebody knew math they would help you with math. If someone knew science you could get tutored in science, if you will. So when, when the Patterson reunion was first, was first developed again by Marlene, Marlene Harkness and them, you know-- you had Jerry Harkness and them come back. Remember Jerry Harkness won the NCAA championship against, against Cincinnati, Loyola against Cincinnati. That was the first of them; you know, that was, that was the black tie affair. But then you had another group, that was the older group, but then you had another group that was little younger then Marlene and those-- I think Marlene and them they might have been like 7, 8 years older; Jerry Harkness might have been like 7, 8 years old. And so you had another group, you had B.B., you had James Brown, you had Pat Combs; Pat Combs being the aunt of Puffy Combs, they got together and I say, "Hey, let's do this reunion." Because our peer group was little larger than Marlene's peer group, their peer group was just basically married and just really left out-

MN: Ok yea, now, when did you actually start doing it at the Patterson Houses?

ND: That was about I guess, 8 years ago, 8 years ago. They would have the dances, the dances on Lenox Avenue at the Fred Samuels Community Center and the actual reunion I believe its sometime in July.

MN: Now, when did they start this benefit softball game that Arnold Melrose talked about?

ND: Oh, that’s after, our best friend died, Monroe, Monroe Russell. He has passed away, so Arnold---

MN: Yea. And what year did that--?

ND: Oh, about, maybe three years ago, four years ago.

MN: Yea, ok so--

ND: It might’ve been, it might be five years-- And, so Arnold took on the initiative of doing the Monroe Russell Benefit softball game because Monroe played on our softball team, he played on the Patterson Knights.

MN: Right now, when Patterson started having reunions, were these Crotona Park reunions already taking place?

ND: Yea, much longer!

MN: So how long have those been going on?

ND: The Crotona Park now has probably gone into its 30th year, 31st year or so.

MN: It’s that long!? So this started in the 70’s, these reunions?

ND: Yea, yea and, and, and it was fortuitous, you know, it was a fortuitous event. And the reason I say it was fortuitous is because tat that particular time, they were renovating, they were renovating Crotona Park. So they took, the said ok look, lets have a picnic over around Tinton Avenue, you know, basketball park over there, you know, with Skinny Reed and them. So everybody say ok because there are a lot of people who grew up in the Forest House who came over to Tinton Avenue and moved into the Projects and they come back. And they say ok well-- And you know a lot of the ballplayers are off of Tinton Avenue-Prospect Avenue, Rodney Hagan and those guys, Ricky Polite, Tony Fields, if you will. And this is where it actually really started

right in the park off of Tinton Avenue. Now, now once Crotona was renovated, then everybody moved back and came back to Crotona--

MN: So this-- it, it started with basketball?

ND: It started with basketball. As most, as most reunions do.

MN: So this was, this was-- the basketball players wanted to have like an old-timers game almost?

ND: Yes.

MN: And then it turned into something larger for the families?

ND: Much larger, much large.

MN: Now, one this you know, I didn’t think I was gonna ask you but it really struck me how many people in your cohort seemed to have died prematurely. What do you attribute that to? Do you think its coincidence or--?

ND: I think it was, I think it was peer group pressure to, to want to belong to some nonsense. You know, and, and once the drugs came into the neighborhood, you know it appears ar though the drugs were very potent so it hooked, it got a lot of people, got a lot of youngsters hooked. Because you know in the beginning you had a lot of the older guys and they were sneaking around getting involved. And then as we became close to 17, 18, years old then we, we kind of realized what was going on cause we saw a lot of them throwing up and you know, arms were bleeding and the hole nine. And then when I went away to college that’s when it got, when I went away to college that’s when it got worse you know, with guys who were in my age group, my peer group. You know one of my best friends again too, I’m going too mention his name, who I love very dearly, Louie Randall. And he went to Cardinal Hayes and he would play football., play basketball, but then I came back, he went to Marist College, and then when I came

back I heard he dropped out of Marist College and he was messing around with heroin, he was shooting heroin.

MN: Right. Now some of the people were also people you had mention and who died in there 50's. Now do you jus think that's the luck of the draw, or do you think that that's also something that sort of-?

ND: NO, because what happened was you had the heroin that came in, in that era, and then you had a lot of folds who said they were gonna clean up and stop. And they stop, but they didn't know now they had the HIV virus in them. And a lot of them died from the HIV virus, not using any more drugs.

MN: Right, so that also took its toll?

ND: Oh yea, it took its toll.

MN: Ok, now I've run out of questions, do you have anything you want to say, you know that we haven't covered?

ND: yea, that it was, it was, it was great experience. I mean growing up in the Patterson Projects was such a great experience because the women were the finest women in the world. They were well protected; they knew that, you know, if you messed with a Patterson woman, I don't care anything nasty to a Patterson woman, you were in trouble. If you denigrated a Patterson woman, I don't care from what projects you were coming from, or wherever you lived, if you denigrated a Patterson girl or a mother you were in trouble, believe me when I tell you. And it was such a great, it was such a great experience because we had a lot of fun with water balloons with Lenny Gethers and Tommy Murphy and Jimmy Murphy and, and Bob Clay Champ and stuff. Like, oh I missed-- he died at a very young age too. It was just, it was just unbelievable because maybe at the time were poor kids, but we didn't realize it. We had such fantastic, we had such fantastic

egos; whatever you said we couldn't do, we'd prove you wrong, we'd prove you wrong. And John Crawford, who became the district superintendent in Community School District 7. And also, Mr. Ed Greenwich, if you know about the experimental model, desegregation if you will, the, the, the first desegregation model was in our community; that was in Community School Board 7, and Ed Greenwich at the time was superintendent, right.

MN: Ok, why don't we stop this--this is just the beginning.

ND: Oh man I could go on for days, I love this, I love this.

MN: Ok.

[END OF INTERVIEW]