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Evans, Howie

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Interviewer: Dr. Mark Naison

Interviewee: Howard Evans

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Transcribed by Gregory Peters

Mark Naison (MN): Yes this is the twenty-seventh interview of the Bronx African-American History Project, we're proud to have as our interviewee Howie Evans who is the sports writer of the Amsterdam News, long time basketball coach and mentor to hundreds if not thousands of young people in New York City and elsewhere. And we are going to start of talking with Howie about his experiences in the Bronx. When did your family move to the Bronx?

Howie Evans (HW): Let's see we moved from Harlem, well we were moving back and forth because my dad was always like one step ahead of the sheriff. So we were always moving back and forth. But I first moved to the Bronx when, I can't say at what age but I can tell you what grade, it was in like third grade. And then went back to Harlem, where I was born in Harlem, Harlem Hospital. And came back to the Bronx I guess when I was like in sixth grade.

MN: Now would that be in the forties or the fifties when you moved back to the Bronx, in the sixth grade?

HW: That was, that was in the early fifties.

MN: In the early fifties.

HW: Yes.

MN: And what, when you were in the sixth grade what neighborhood was your family living in?

HW: Um, we lived in the Hunts Point Section. In various cellars, we were always the superintendents.

MN: Oh ok so...

HW: Yes we were always the superintendents. We lived on Southern Boulevard, we lived on Elder Ave. we lived on 167 St, we lived on Hoe Ave. But we lived, all in that area and at that time, and in that particular community it was probably a 99 percent Jewish community. There were some Italian families, and there were no Hispanic families in the community then, and there were like nine black families and we were all -

MN: Superintendents, because a number of the people I've interviewed said that in many parts of the Bronx the only way a black family could get an apartment was by having the father become the super.

HW: Yes, exactly.

MN: And were the schools you went to overwhelmingly white in the Bronx?

HW: Oh yes, the public school I went to, Public School 75 right off of Bruckner which you could see driving on the Bruckner Expressway. It was, there were no black teachers and the only black kids in the school were us, the kids who lived in the neighborhood. And it was like nine, maybe nine or ten of us, nine families. Actually three of us lived, 1041 Bryant Ave, 1043 Bryant Ave, and 1045 Bryant Ave and then there was a family that lived on the opposite side of the street. And then there were two families that lived I think it was Elder Ave. So it was a very small, small community of us.

MN: Now what were these, these buildings look like? Were these like walk-ups or elevator buildings?

HW: No they were all walk-ups, they were all walk-ups. But in our case it was a walk down. One time I walked up when I was helping my father clean the halls, stuff like that, but they were all walk-ups.

MN: And did you have brothers and sisters?

HW: Yes I had one sister, and five brothers.

MN: And so were your siblings younger or older?

HW: I was the oldest.

MN: You were the oldest.

HW: Yes, I was the oldest.

MN: Now, was there, did you feel much racial tension in this, the neighborhood when that you grew up in?

HW: You know something when you are a kid, and I see it today, and I've seen it throughout all of the schools that I've worked at, that young kids in particular don't really see color. You know, if they see you as a nice kid, if you know six or seven year olds play together and so forth. We didn't, we never really had problems within that Hunts Point community. The problems we had because at that time, there was a lot of gang activity on the edges of the community which eventually came in. And a lot of the tough guys from other communities would come in, into the Hunts Point area and so forth. But there was very little hostility because if there had been more Black families, or more Hispanic families maybe there would have been hostility. But there were so few blacks that there was no reason to have hostility cause we posed no threat to anyone, either educationally, socially, or employment wise. Because we were all superintendents so we weren't taking anyone's jobs and so forth. Now we, all of my friends and all of us were very integrated. But for some reason all of the black guys we always had our own team, and we were the best athletes in that community. So we always had our softball team, best basketball team, Little League basketball whatever they called it.

MN: Was there organized adult supervised sports activities in that neighborhood? Were there, or it was mostly pickup games?

HW: No most of the games we created and invented ourselves. There weren't a lot of cars in the streets then, so we could play in the streets without a lot of traffic. We would play a game at night time; we never played in the daytime for some reason. So we would play a game at night time, we called it kick the can. And we would put a can on one corner of the, you know the four blocks. So this corner here would be home plate, that corner would be first base, that corner would be second base. And we would kick the can, and -

MN: And you would run the bases.

HW: We would run the bases. So that was a game that we created and there were a lot of other little games that we did, because there were no, at that time, no really supervised activities. The only activities that we really had were in the summer time, they called summer playgrounds. And then guys would come in from other communities and work in the schools. And one of the guys would coach, get together a softball team and so forth.

MN: Right, now did your family remain in the Bronx after sixth grade? Or did you go back to Harlem again?

HW: We went back to Harlem. Let's see, I graduated from there in eighth grade, and at that point we had started sort of gravitating away and moving away from our white friends.

Because at a certain age the white, they would stop playing with us when they were like fourteen and fifteen because then they would start socializing with girls and all. And that became the dividing point then, that little Bobby and Howie Lipschitz, who eventually changed his name to Howie Leads, they started, started fooling with girls and all. So that right away put us on this side, and so forth. And that's what, they would never invite us to the parties, the parents would never invite us to the parties. So we had to create our own social atmosphere after we were fourteen years of age we had to start creating our own social atmosphere.

MN: Now did you, were there any neighborhood, predominantly Black neighborhoods in the Bronx? Like in Morrisania where you could go to? Or you had to go to Harlem to find that?

HW: No, there weren't any, at that time in that area there were no predominantly Black neighborhoods. In, I would say, when we moved over to Prospect Ave that was as big a Black neighborhood at that time. Because it was a lot of Black families and a lot of, most of the families in that neighborhood from the Church, from Tinton Ave, from the Prospect Ave. train station all the way down, there were mostly Black families in that neighborhood.

Around Morris High School, which I eventually went to, it was a Black neighborhood, but as you move closer to the school it was a lot of private houses and a lot of, I would say Irish families still lived in those houses, a lot of Jewish families and the kids all went to Morris High School.

MN: Right, now do you remember, like a number of people have mentioned in that era, like Club 895 and as a venue for, you know for music, Sylvia's Blue Morocco and places like that in Morrisania.

HW: Yes, when I got, you know when I got into adulthood I couldn't go into those places then. Sylvia's, well first it was something else before it became the Blue Morocco, I can't remember but it was something else. Then it became Sylvia's Blue Morocco. But even before the Blue Morocco there was a club on Prospect Ave just as you go into Crotona Park, Prospect and Boston Rd., it was called Kenny's. And the owner of that was a doctor, and his son and I went to school together, his son Howard Bowman. And they were all big guys, and his brother Bobby Bowman, and they were all basketball players. And Bobby ended up going to Harvard where he played, where he started and played, he was starting center like three or four years, he was really a good basketball player. But there was no, there was no avenue for

Blacks after college then. And but he had entertainment in his restaurant but it was on a local scale. When -

MN: It was called Kenny's.

HW: Yes, it was called Kenny's, and when they started the Blue Morocco, then it became Sylvia's Blue Morocco, and she started bringing in up and coming entertainers. And that is where I first saw Nancy Wilson -

MN: Really wow.

HW: - Perform in that place when I was very young. And actually I was too young to get in there. But because I played ball, and a lot of the people knew us so they would kind of let us in cause we weren't like gonna come in and raise hell and so forth. But that is where I saw a lot of the early entertainers. Now there was a club on Boston Rd. that sort of preceded Sylvia's, it was called the Boston Road Ballroom. And the Boston Road Ballroom was owned by a Black guy named Stanley Adams, who was one of the better basketball players at the time, and he was in partnership with two friends. And they had probably the best club in the city at that time for entertainment, because all of the great musicians performed there who eventually became national and international stars, like Sam and Dave who are still performing today. I can't think of -

MN: So this is in the fifties the Boston Road Ballroom?

HW: Yes, this is in the fifties, and they kept the place going well into the sixties and the seventies, and they started getting older. Then they started opening up other businesses, two of the guys got sick, Stanley got sick and he passed away. The other guy got sick and he passed away, and the other guy just sold the club. I think his name was Charlie, it was Stanley, Charlie, and George.

Smith: What did they do specifically to get that kind of talent in that club you know in the Bronx? They paid them better than anyone else in the city?

HW: Yes, they paid because the crowds were, I mean you had to get in there and they had the place fixed up nice there were a lot of tables in there and so forth. They had a nice stage, and the thing about their place was that the entertainment when they said that they were going to perform at nine o'clock they performed at nine o'clock and all. So the people would come and they would sit at the tables and they got paid well. For some of them it was their best paydays playing there, because they loved playing there. And Sam and Dave, that's where they made their reputation and of course they went on to become, during their time, among the biggest record sellers in the country. And they are still, I don't know, I think Sam still performs.

MN: Sam yes he, Sam Moore is everywhere.

HW: You know and he gets, he gets a nice buck on these oldie shows, he's always on television on those -

MN: Oh, he's terrific.

HW: Yes, and you look at it now I saw him some months ago on one of those taped oldie shows, and it was like watching him thirty years ago. You know I mean he was still strong, his voice was strong and everything.

Smith: Howie, do you remember some of the jazz artists that played in the Boston Road Ballroom?

HW: Yes, there were a lot of local guys. Because at that time most of the jazz was in Harlem and there were very few outfits in the Bronx for Jazz, and in particular Black Jazz artists, so most of them played down at the clubs in Harlem. But they would come up to the Boston Road Ballroom after the place closed down and they would all sit around and they

would play, and they would play. And that became like a sort of, kind of a hang out for me because Stanley Adams was a little bit older than me. And we had a team called the Chryslers, he was in the Chrysler Seniors, I was in the Chrysler Juniors so he would kind of let me hang around cause I loved music. So I'd just sit around listen to them, all of these guys one day, I remember one day Miles Davis came up he would play. I remember Dizzie Gillespie coming up, I just remember all of these guys coming up and I was just amazed because these guys would come up and they never had music. And they would sit around and they would talk and all of a sudden they would start playing. You know as if somebody said now, but they would just start playing. It was nothing from, one guy would be sitting here like this another guy would be sitting there and they would just play. And I thought that was the greatest thing.

MN: Did your family belong to a church?

HW: Yes, first we belonged to a church on Crotona Avenue, I can't even remember the name of it. And then we became members of Thessalonia...

MN: Oh, ok.

HW: Yes where I was eventually Baptized, but the church that I grew up in was on Crotona Avenue across from the park, it was a small church. But there was so much going on in that church it was unbelievable man, it really turned me away from my religion.

MN: Haha, so going on in a not good way.

HW: Yes, yes, you know cause I was younger and you know my parents were telling me cause, see the thing was you know how it was like in a lot of African-American families if you didn't go to church, go to Sunday school, then you couldn't come out and play on Sunday. So you had to go to church, Sunday school in the morning so I could come back and play. But I would always kind of get caught, because my mother would get me and I'd be in church all

day and then at Sunday night at six o'clock they would have this, what they called BYPU, for children or something. So I was literally in church all day until I got old enough to really rebel and say I am not going to church.

MN: Now when did you start playing organized basketball in leagues? How old were you?

HW: Probably, I'd say probably around fourteen, probably around fourteen.

MN: And who organized that program? How did you find it?

HW: Well the first time I started playing in leagues was in the community centers, which probably, the community centers were something that became very dear to my heart, because they eventually saved my life.

MN: These were the public school community centers?

HW: It was like, around the city there was like over five hundred, six hundred, every public school was opened after school, for kids to come in. And they had two sessions from three o'clock to five o'clock and they would, the school would close down, and then from seven to ten. So the public schools in our neighborhoods was everything to us, because it was like a social place, it was a place where we could play, and play on an organized level.

MN: Did you have knock hockey in your -

HW: Yes, knock hockey, ping-pong you know we had all of that, but I was always in the gym. And during that time it was, the gang activity in the South Bronx was at its peak.

MN: Now this was what years would you say this was? Mid-fifties?

HW: Yes, from the early fifties up until I would say up until at least fifty-five fifty-six.

MN: And what were the names of the gangs that you remember?

HW: The gangs I was in? (laughs).

MN: (laughs), yes that's ok.

HW: The gangs were tremendous, and they were highly organized and the numbers in the gangs was tremendous. When I moved to Prospect Ave., I automatically had to be in a gang. And I went to a kid named Charlie Torres, and his brother who was older than us attended Fordham, and taught here but Charlie Torres was a gang member. And since we were very close I eventually drifted into the gang with him. Which happened to be an all Puerto Rican gang, and they called me Jackie Robinson. (laughter) You know because I could outrun everybody in the gang and so forth. But, there were the Lightnings, the Penguins, the Lucky Seven, the Slicksters which was the most, which was the deadliest and the biggest gang, then there was the - and the gang life in the South Bronx, like it was in many other parts of the city, was highly structured and highly organized, it wasn't like a loose fabric of people. They had officers and all, they had a president, they had a vice-president, then they had a war counselor. And the war counselor was the guy who would meet with the war counselor of the other gang and say it's on, and all. And no one really challenged this gang the Slicksters, no one really challenged them because they were at that point older, some older guys but there were so many of them.

MN: Now were these gangs pretty much organized around racial or ethnic lines or were there some, were they multiethnic?

HW: No they were organized around racial lines, and you would, there were only a few black guys in the Latin gangs. There were Puerto Ricans then, because there weren't any other Hispanic groups.

MN: So were the Slicksters a Puerto Rican gang?

HW: They were Black.

MN: They were a Black gang.

HW: Yes they were Black, most of the gangs in the South Bronx at that time were Black, except the Penguins and the Lightnings and so forth. But they were among the deadliest of gangs because they had come from very gang oriented activity from Puerto Rico and so forth. So that was like really a way of life to them, they were more organized than the Black gangs in terms of weapons, in terms of how they would go to war, and so forth.

MN: What sort of weapons were at that point?

HW: Well most, a lot of the guys had zip guns, what we call zip guns, which we used to make in shop. Which was made constructed out of wood, but with these rubber bands, these red rubber bands that would expand like this, and all. And I hated shop, but I had a friend who loved to do that so he would make, he would do all my shop work and he would make all the guns and all. So I kept a zip gun under the bathroom tub all the way in the corner and all. But many of the Hispanic gangs had the real thing.

MN: They had real guns.

HW: They had real guns and all, and the gang war was so intense that there were times that you couldn't go to school. You know, because if you got caught in school, then you know you'd either get killed or severely beaten. The other interesting thing is that in this neighborhood here, what we call the north Bronx we had the Fordham Road Baldies, and another gang that was even bigger than them. But those kids, in those gangs were all, all derivatives of their parents, the father, because they were organized crime you know all along Arthur Ave. Well Blacks couldn't come on Fordham Rd. then, but the furthest Blacks could come during that time was maybe where Boston Rd intersected with Southern Boulevard.

MN: You couldn't go into Crotona Park?

HW: Oh no no! You could only go, you could only go into the, up to the lake in Crotona Park, where the lake is. But if you got caught on the other side then you had some major

problems of getting back. You know, but the gangs then in the South Bronx would fight I mean all the time. I mean it was like a daily thing, it wasn't like once in a while or once a month, it was a way of life. And my family moved out of the gang neighborhood, we moved in with a family up on 223rd St.

MN: In the Wakefield section?

HW: No.

MN: Williamsbridge?

MN: No, along White Plains Rd. that section. You know near Evander Childs. So I went to Evander Childs, it was only three Blacks in the school then, when I went there.

And I couldn't stay there because every day I had to run to the subway to get home. So my first year at Evander Childs I was out of school for 55 days because I was scared to go to school. So eventually at the end of the year they put me out of school for truancy and that's how I ended up at Morris High School. But at Morris High School the gangs were just as bad and there was one year, I think it was my sophomore year, I missed school sixty-five days because I couldn't go to school while the gangs were at war with each other. They had all of the movie theaters, were sectioned off, the whole movie sections were always all gangs. Any of the adults who wanted to go to the movies, they went downtown they didn't go into the neighborhood's movie theaters because there were like ten thousand neighborhood movie theaters. But if you went into the movie theaters they were sectioned off by power. The Slicksters would have like one whole side, you couldn't sit there. Another group would have the middle, and every group new exactly where you had to sit, and all. So that was, I mean that was something else the movies along Prospect Avenue, there were three movies on Prospect Avenue between the train station and the Church, they're all closed down now. There was a Loews Theater there, there was a, there were two other theaters I don't

remember their names. But there were, they were basically closed down because the management couldn't control us kids in there at that time. So when I say the community centers, when you asked , about the community centers, and the gangs were in many of the community centers. And there were community centers where you couldn't go because the gangs said this is our center, this is our school. So you couldn't go to that school. So we had these leagues, each school had teams and so forth. But there were schools where we couldn't go, they wouldn't let us in, the gangs wouldn't let us in. We would have to fight our way in.

Man: Howie, did a lot of the kids graduate you know during that era? Did they graduate from high school or was there like a high dropout rate because of all the gang activity?

HW: No, you know strangely enough a lot of the kids graduated. But a lot of the kids ended up in prison and for some reason it was mostly the Hispanic kids who ended up in prison. Because at that time for some reason, a lot of the Hispanic kids didn't like school that much, so they didn't want other people to go to school. You see, and all, and you know I'm not being ethnic you know, but that was the cold fact. You know and you know it was a high premium placed on, you know getting out of high school.

MN: Now where, now there were still white kids in those neighborhoods weren't there? Were they also in gangs?

HW: Yes, well you know, the districts, the boundaries then were vast. And the boundaries had been created well before the influx of African-Americans and Hispanics in many of the schools. But the schools in the Bronx were broken down, like Columbus High School which is not too far from here, was virtually an all Italian school because it was in an Italian neighborhood. Roosevelt High School at one time was mostly Irish cause of where it's situated now and so forth, and I mean mostly Italian because of, this was a tremendous

Italian community. So in those days most of the kids in that school were Italian in Roosevelt. So, James Monroe High School was virtually an all Jewish high school. JFK wasn't built then, Bronx Science was you know for the very you know upper elite kids and all -

MN: Now were you, did you get involved in Doo-Wop and Rock and Roll singing when you know?

HW: Yes we all did. Because we used to sing in church, we used to go to these churches and sing. We had a little group and go to churches and sing. Mostly to impress the girls, to tell you the truth.

MN: Did you mean, was there a lot of singing in the street corners, that sort of stuff?

HW: Well my guys didn't do that, but there were other people who did. You know they maybe would be in the schools, they liked to sing in the bathrooms. They would go in the bathrooms and sing, and this was in the community centers, and so forth. But they would go into the bathrooms and sing, because they didn't have, really have teachers to instruct these kids.

MN: Now when was the first time you played on a high school basketball team? Was that at Evander or at Morris?

HW: No at Morris, cause I got kicked out of Evander for truancy. I think it was my sophomore year, because there was a time when there was a teacher strike so they closed all the athletic programs down. But I played basketball, and I ran track, and I played baseball. We didn't have a football team but I played Club football team, we had a football league for high school guys that was organized by a judge, a judge named Lyons who lived in, it was a building down at Southern Boulevard and intersects with 163rd St. It's still there, it is a huge building but it was a building of, it was a residential building of the elite Jewish families in

the neighborhood. And he was a judge and he had a big house there and his son went to school, and his son named I think his name was Kenneth Lyons. So he organized this football team called the Clippers. So outside of school we played with the Clippers, and we went all over the city playing. It was some kind of league that we played in.

MN: When did somebody start telling you that you should think about going to college? Was this something that happened early or relatively late?

HW: No, it basically it didn't happen till I was a senior in high school. I had no idea about college. All I knew was that the guys were playing, and I used to watch them. Because then they would have some games like NYU and Fordham. Because NYU then was like the premier program and those games were like sometimes on TV. And we would watch it, but I never, I just thought that they guys playing and they played for NYU. I had no idea what NYU was, I had no idea what LIU was or anything. But I was playing, and in my junior year I started getting a lot of accolades. And then when I became a senior I was captain of the team and I made the All-City team, and I got a scholarship to NYU. And I remember that was one of the first write-ups I got in the paper, they put in the paper that I was going to NYU. At that time NYU hadn't had any black players. They had had one guy named Herman Taylor and something happened. But that is when I first started playing.

MN: So you were one of the first black players ever to play in NYU?

HW: But I never played, because what happened was Howard Can, who was the coach then, as I later found out, was a very racist guy. He recruited, one of his players had become a coach up in Westchester, and he told Can about these two guys that happened to be black guys and my coach had graduated from Manhattan. And he had tried to get me to go to Manhattan but I didn't like Manhattan. So I went to NYU -

MN: And this was in the Bronx, at that time? The NYU you went to, or was it downtown?

HW: No it was I think it was up on the Oval.

Man: On Burnside.

HW: Yes, and we went there and we kind of just dominated these other kids that were there, even some of the guys who were on the team and all. And, that was at a time when coaches could do whatever they want. You could practice any time you know not like this October 15th thing, that wasn't even in the books then. You know you could maybe start practicing you know. And I went up to the school and he had the team organized and we were so much better than the other players. So it was like two weeks after that, we got letters stating that there had been, something with the money, and that they could no longer give us scholarships. So my parents couldn't afford college you know. So I really didn't understand any of it at that time, I was eighteen years old. I didn't understand any of it you know. All I knew was the guy sent a letter saying that we didn't have any scholarships no more, you know. So I ended up going to school at Maryland Eastern Shore, which was then Maryland State. And I got down there because my uncle knew the coach, and the coach was a guy Earl Banks.

MN: A pretty famous guy.

HW: Yes, he was like the assistant coach, and he knew him. So the school year had started and I went down there and the football was practicing. I ended up actually playing football before I played basketball, yes.

Man: Howie during your earlier years let's say elementary school, junior high school was there any sort of catalyst that got you interested in writing and becoming the great sports writer journalist that you are today?

HW: I'll tell you what, I was horrible in English in school. You know with verbs, I mean I was just terrible. And the one teacher that I remember in high school more so than any other, I can't remember any other teacher's name I swear. But there was a teacher named Mrs. Ryan, she was at Morris High School. And I thought she was the meanest woman in the world, I mean this woman, I mean she was so tough. It was the only class that I went where nobody ever talked, unless she asked you to talk. You know you didn't say anything in our class at all, you know. But she was always talking about verbs and trying to show you verbs, and then she would give you assignments to write. And she couldn't understand how I could write compositions but I didn't know a verb from - you know. And I didn't even understand it myself shoot you know. All I know was she would say well this is what you write, I was like well I'll write that you know.

Man: It's a natural background.

HW: Yes, so anyway I went, when I went to Maryland, Adam Clayton Powell came to give the commencement speech. I think I might have been, I think I was like freshman or a sophomore. He came to give a commencement speech, and I had only known about Adam Clayton Powell. You know I'd never met him you know and all, and I'd seen him from a distance but I knew that he was this figure that was bigger than God, you know in the community. And he came and he gave a speech, and I was so like, I was like mesmerized by the speech that this guy gave. He stood up there, and I had never heard a black man talk like that, with such fury you know, but yet so controlled and so concise. So I went back to the dorm, and I wrote a story about it. I just wrote something that you know I was so inspired by what this guy said, I said I just got to write. So I sent the story to the Baltimore Sun, in Baltimore and they published it.

Man: Wow.

HW: And the guy, some guy called me and said he wanted me to be, asked me if I had time to be a correspondent on the eastern shore, because you know Baltimore is on the western shore of Maryland. And -

MN: This is while you are still in college?

HW: Yes, so I became a correspondent like on the eastern shore. And I dare say I was probably the first Black writer at that paper, you know. Which I didn't know then, but after I thought about it years later, and I remember when they got a, hired a Black guy and made a big thing about it, this was like years later. And it never even dawned on me, and I must have been in my forties or something. I said you know something I probably was the first Black guy at that paper.

MN: Now this is in the late fifties?

HW: Yes this is in the late fifties. So, I became the correspondent, and I would write about things that were happening on the eastern shore of Maryland. And send it back to them, I'd put it in an envelope you know because they didn't have fax machines. And you had to put it in an envelope and mail it to the guy. But I never saw the stories because the Baltimore Sun didn't come down that way, so I never saw it. And when the guy said we printed your story – (laughter)

MN: Now so you were playing basketball and football there, and also writing?

HW: Yes, but the writing wasn't like, it was like once a week thing like you know and stuff like that. It wasn't like a daily thing, and sometimes they would ask me to go some place.

MN: Now did you see yourself, when you were doing this, wow I am going to be a journalist?

HW: No, not ever. No, no that was the furthest thing. I wanted to be a professional athlete and that's what I wanted to do. And when I, I played football but I reached the point in

football where I got hurt. I busted up my knee and I started basketball late as a result. And it dawned on me that I can't, if I am going to play basketball then I am going to have to find a way to keep from getting hurt playing football. So I played football that year and then the second year I went out for the team. And a guy a named Sherman Plunkett, you might remember him.

MN: Oh man.

HW: Played for the Jets. Yes well I was, I wrote a play in practice. And this guy then man, he was like 275. We called him Big Boy, he's like a monster. You know and I am like 155 man, and I am coming around him man, and this guy comes out, nobody's blocking him and I see this guy coming at me. And I stop cold in my tracks, and I said Big Boy please don't hit me. He's getting ready to put the wood on me. (laughter) Hey, two days later I told the coach, I'm done, I'm done. You know I am done, you know I mean I was hurt all the time.

MN: Now if you're, you know you were at a traditionally black college, and wanted to play professional basketball. Were there people, did you have, were there other people coming from schools like that who were playing professionally at that time?

HW: Yeshey recruited a lot of guys at the school that I went to. A lot of guys from Oklahoma, cause the coaches were from Oklahoma. And actually during the time I was there at least six or seven of the guys ended up in the NFL, including Johnny Santo, a number of those guys.

MN: What about basketball? Was it, it was pretty hard to make the NBA from a black college in those days?

HW: It was pretty hard for blacks to make -

Man: In general.

HW: In general, from anywhere. I mean no matter you know, the curse of our era is that when I was in Maryland and the black schools, all the greatest black athletes in the United States were all in black schools. So therefore none of the white schools would play. Now sometimes kids would play, you know we'd play make up games, you know like in the playground in the summertime. They knew and the coaches knew. So the coaches would never, would never ever schedule, because they couldn't compete with the black players at all, at none of those schools. Most of the schools in the ACC, the coaches there took everything from the black coaches at the black schools. Like the running game, and all of that, the motion offense which was Clarence (Big House) Gaines which became the offense that North Carolina used for many years with Dean Smith. The four corner offense that was perfected by Phil Ford was actually used in 1946 and '47 by Coach John McLendon.

Man: You mean UNC's Phil Ford.

HW: Yes the first time I saw that particular offense we went to play Tennessee State when they had Dick Barnett, they had Dick Barnett, Chico Vaughn, they had the Port of Maryland all five of those guys were drafted into the NBA. But the thing is that they were waxing us pretty good. And it was about five minutes left in the game, and we were down like fifteen or sixteen points. And all of a sudden you saw one guy go this way and one guy was in this corner, one guy was there. And so I like looked to the coach like - their whole floor was spread open. And Dick Barnett had the ball in the middle of the floor, so it's like what are these guys doing? Well McLendon called it the Jack in the Corner, that is what he called his offense the Jack in the Corner. Because it turned out they you know they changed the name to the four corner offense, but it was the Jack in the Comer. And eventually Dean Smith readily, finally admitted that indeed that is where, and in fact coach McLendon went to North

Carolina on the sneak when we were working at Converse and taught him the intricacies of running that offense, and all.

MN: Wow, now were the Globetrotters in the picture at that time? You know for the players who were excluded from the NBA?

HW: Yes well the Globetrotters, yes, the Globetrotters did the highest recruiting. They recruited, they tried to get Sam Jones to play with them. And of course Sam was up with the Celtics yes, and he ended up going to the Celtics. But they tried to get him. But they got some of their best talent out of the black schools then, and all the Globetrotters. The Rens they were, they played a different type of game. But they played a very serious type of game. Cause the Rens and the Globetrotters, when the Globetrotters played serious basketball they were you know one of the best teams in the country.

MN: Now when you graduated did you go back to New York City? Or did you go you know elsewhere first?

HW: No, no I came, you know I came back to New York. Actually, when you asked me about the community centers before, the community centers was a place, there was a guy named Jack Bernstein, he was the supervisor in the district. And I was going to Community Center 99, and -

MN: Community Center 99 is it PS 99?

HW: PS 99.

MN: Which is famous in hip-hop, cause the 99 school yard were Grandmaster Flash had this—

HW: Yes, well they, one of the things that –

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

MN: Ok, you were saying about the community center saving your life, and about being at the 99 center.

HW: Well the 99, I lived on Prospect Avenue, 99 was on Stebbins Ave it was a block away from where I lived. And that became sort of a safe haven for me, because that's where my mother and father would let me go, that far. And eventually in the school like I said, we were talking about the gangs before, I was involved in the gangs. And at 99 I remember one of the things that saved my life there was a guy there named Mr. Tibbs, his name was Vincent Tibbs. He was a little short guy and he had arms like this, I mean we, everybody, I mean nobody like, when he said do something that is what you do. Because he looked like, I mean he looked like Atlas, you know the guy was built like I don't know what. You know I'd never seen anybody like that, built like that, you know. So, I became the president of the Youth Counsel; we used to give these affairs. And one night we were having this dance contest and there was a gang, a newly organized gang that had come from Boston Rd. And they all wore black silk shirts and black pants, you know. And they were all like big guys, and everybody was like, "Who are these guys, where'd they come from?" But they had come from Boston Rd and they didn't have any name, they didn't name themselves at all. But they would just come in and create havoc, and everybody was like intimidated by them. So, I was trying to clear the floor so we could have this mambo contest, I'll never forget this.

MN: So you were, yes, ok go ahead.

HW: And the night, the day before my father, it was an Easter weekend, my father had hit the number for about six thousand dollars.

Man: Ooooh.

HW: And he'd bought me a suit, two suits. I remember we went down to Delancey St. got these suits. One of them was a tan double-breasted suit, you know and I wasn't supposed to

be wearing this suit before Easter Sunday. So, anyway I put this suit on, because we were having the dance on Friday, put this suit on. So I am trying to clear the floor, you know. The guys, these guys stood in the middle of the floor like we aren't moving. So I said, "You got to get off the floor man, we trying to have this contest." So, the guy pulls out a knife and swings at me, and my jacket was open and if my jacket hadn't been open I probably would have gotten slashed. So it cut all the inside of my jacket, phew. And that like started it you know, so everybody went crazy. So they like ran out, and I am going out and Mr. Tibbs comes and he grabs me and he takes me in his office. And I am you know like, now I'm like furious you know. All my boys are outside, and they waiting like what we going to do? So, this guy stands at the door, he stands at the door right in front of the door. And he starts, he starts telling me, he says you have a chance to do something with your life, you have this -

Man: This is Mr. Tibbs?

HW: This is Mr. Tibbs, he says you have an opportunity to do something with your life. He said you have all of this, he said you are one of the best athletes in the neighborhood and etc. He said you gonna go out in the street and get killed with this. So I said Mr. Tibbs I am going out, so he said, he said Howie the only way that you are going to get through that door is you got to come through me. And he stood in front of that door, and I am crying, and I'm crying tears are coming down my eyes and all. But he would not let me out that door until the whole street was cleared. Till everybody, there was nobody in the street at all, nobody. And the only thing I was afraid of, Because I had to go home and tell my father my suit was cut up. I wasn't even afraid of those guys you know. But, a week later, a week later, the gang that I was in was fighting this gang on that same block where Thessalonia Baptist Church is, a gang called the Lightnings. Whose then, they had risen to become the worst gang in New York City.

MN: That was a Latin gang?

HW: It was a Latin gang. And we were going in to fight these guys in this block. And I remember us walking down the hill and there was a guy who was, a guy named Pento. And he was the president of our gang, he was a little short guy, I remember this guy had, his complexion was horrible. I guess from his diet, or not eating, or whatever it was. And we were walking down, it was like five hundred of us, and we're walking down coming from Prospect Ave, walking down that hill into the block. And we get to going down, the officers in the gang they were in three cars. And this guy Pinto, if you could visualize this guy Pinto jumps out of the car and he has two guns in his hands like this. And I'm like, oh man, it's really going to be on today man. You know, we was all like fired up, we are going to fire these guys up today. You know, so we get into the block, the church is right here you know and there is nobody in the street man. I mean the street is like empty. And all of a sudden man stuff come flying from the roofs, man. And shots go bam, bam, bam. And guys started throwing bricks from the roof. The guy I was standing next to all of sudden he grabs his head and blood jumps out of his head, a brick hits him the head. So I started running, I ran all the way across, you know 163rd St? I ran all the way across 163rd St, all the way to Bruckner Boulevard, you know where Bruckner Boulevard is right?

MN: Yes.

HW: Then, there was nothing up there, it was like a forest. There was nothing there then, except that bridge, that you know where the Bruckner is, that bridge that you go across Bruckner Expressway. It was nothing there then, the only thing there then was a White Castle. It was like driving down south, it was like an oasis, you see a White Castle. You know, that was the only thing on Bruckner Boulevard then it was just a whole bunch of trees of nothing. So, me and this guy were running, the other guy had fallen. So we run and

we, there was like a little lake over there then. And we dove behind this lake, and we laid in that thing man until it was dark, man. I mean it was nighttime, because I wasn't coming out. You know because these guys had lit us up man. And guy's bodies were laying in the streets and all. So, anyway when I got home my father beat the devil out of me anyway. But the next day, that was the headlines in the paper. You know they talked, they it was called one of the worst gang fights in the history of New York.

MN: Wow, do you remember what year this was? If we can find it in the papers?

HW: I can't, they wrote a book about it. It was called *The Last Great Gang War*, a guy wrote a book about it. *The Last Great Gang Fight* or something like that. But somebody wrote a book about that. And I had the book, but I don't know what happened to it during the course of the years. I probably lost the book.

MN: So this was like 1954, '55?

Man: Probably earlier than that.

HW: No it was a little earlier than that, yes it was a little earlier than that, yes.

MN: Now you mentioned mambo, was your group into Latin dancing?

HW: Mambo yes. Yes, because that was the Hispanic influence had started coming into the community and it was a ballroom on Southern Boulevard called the Hunts Point Ballroom. And, that is where all of the big bands would play, and in particular the Hispanic bands. That is where I first saw Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, not Celia Cruz, the drummer-

MN: Mango Santamaria.

HW: Mango Santamaria, that's where I first saw all those guys.

MN: At the Hunts Point Ballroom.

HW: Hunts Point Ball - Hunts Point Palace.

MN: Hunts Point Palace.

HW: Hunts Point Palace, it was called the Hunts Point Palace. Right on the corner there, where it intersects with 163rd St. and right across from the Professional Building.

MN: Oh so this is at 163rd St?

HW: Yes, that is where it was.

MN: Wow so you could walk there?

HW: Yes, we walked everywhere man. We didn't, you know except the time when they still had the trolleys we'd jump on the back of the trolleys. But if the cops caught you, you know they'd beat you up and stuff you know.

MN: Wow, so ok now you graduated from college and you come back to New York. Now what did you start doing when you returned to New York?

HW: Well all the time that I was in college I was working in community centers. I got a Board of Education License, and I was probably the only person that ever got a Board of Education License before going to college. But there was this Jewish guy who was really a wheeler dealer. And he was really like taken back by my leadership, you know the way I could control people and the way people gravitated towards me, and the way I was organizing stuff. And Tibbs, Tibbs Tolan, he says look the only way we are going to save this guy's life, because the guys in the gangs in this community will listen to this guy and they'll respect him and all. And so they, he got me a Board of Education License. 180255.

Man: Your file number.

HW: Which was my file number.

Man: That's right.

HW: Which I had throughout my, I mean for the next thirty years that was the file number I had.

MN: And that is to be a teacher in the community centers.

HW: That is to be a teacher. But eventually I got a Board of Ed License to teach, and you don't change your file number.

MN: In other words you had a license to teach in the school before you went to college.

HW: Yes, and I was in the community centers. But that same file number I was able to use when I went to teach in the regular schools.

MN: So you became a -

Man: What did you use it for before college?

HW: I was working in the summer playgrounds. I would come home summers and work in the playgrounds, and that is how they paid you by a file number and all. You know you just put the file number on the thing. And then when I started, when I was teaching it was the same number and all. So throughout my career in education that number never changed and all, it was amazing.

MN: Now what grade did you start teaching when you came back from college?

HW: I didn't go right in to teaching then. I was basically, I started working in the Board of Education. In that after-school program, Director of Community Centers. And then I was teaching, later on I started teaching at a Junior High school on 125, where I met Len Elmore. And I was Len Elmore's mentor. You know I was teaching at a, I had a deal with the principal. Because I was hustling man, I was trying to get money to buy a car and all. But I was really, I was always hustling, looking to make money. So I made this deal with the principal of the school, because I heard that they were looking for a black guy. You know they wanted a black guy because there were no black teachers.

MN: This was in the Bronx again?

HW: This was in Queens.

MN: In Queens?

HW: Somebody told me about this school. So I had never really been to Queens. So I go out to Queens, and this guy is a Dutchman. You know, so I said, look I already got a job, but I'd like to make a deal with you. Nobody wanted to do yard duty and nobody wanted to do lunch duty, because then that is when they first started busing black kids into the schools, public schools. They were busing black kids from Jamaica up into Sunnyside, up in Queens, which was an Irish and Italian community. And basically they were looking for a tough guy, somebody who could control these bad ass kids, whom they thought were bad you know. So, I said you know like, this is like stealing money from these kids. These kids aren't going be tougher than me.

Man: They don't know the real deal.

HW: No, no. So the first day I get into the school I see this big huge kid walking through. I was teaching a gym class, I was a sub and I was going to be a sub for all the other, if any black teacher didn't show up then I would sub in those classes. I see this big guy walking to the school, so I say hey well where is the gym? He says I don't know. I look at this guy, I say what do you mean you don't know? He said, I don't know where the gym is. I said, don't you play basketball? He said no I don't play basketball. So I get down to the gym, talking with the other teacher there, and he's the basketball coach. So I said, I saw a big kid walking in the halls he told me he don't play. He said oh no that's Elmore, he doesn't play basketball. What do you mean he doesn't play? He can't play. I said why don't you teach him to play? He's the biggest thing in the school. (laughter). The kid is 6'6" he's like thirteen years old. The guy doesn't want to teach him, so I said well I'll teach this guy how to play. You know so, I went got the kid and said look you interested in learning how to play. He said yes, so anyway. (laughter) You know all he said was yes, he didn't know anything, but he said you've got to ask my mother. So, I said ok, you know. I get in the car, I

drove him home. He lives out, I forget where he lives in Queens. His father works in the sanitation department, his mother was a nurse. So his mother says, Mr. Evans, Lenny has asthma, that is why we don't let him out. (laughter) This is true, so I said yes Mrs. Elmore but at his age through exercise he can overcome this asthma. I said just give me the opportunity. So here she is a public nurse, so anyway to make a long story short I take Lenny out and we started playing and all. And then I said look, are you interested in going to a high school other than a public school? So I went to talk to his parents, I said look I've got some friends over at Power Memorial. And I think, I can get him in. Note, this kid has never ever played a full court game of basketball in his life. So I load up five kids, two kids - one kid was a baseball player an Irish kid, I forget this kid' name but he was a very good athlete. He was a better athlete than all the other kids, he played baseball and basketball. So I take these kids over to Power Memorial, and the coach was not Donahue but the other guy, Kearney, Kearney, I think is not in coaching anymore. So he has five kids, so he puts them in a full court game but not on the long court in Power Memorial, you know the court that went this way. So they start playing and all of a sudden this kid Elmore is blocking shots, bam bam bam. So I am like amazed man this kid hasn't ever played, all I did was head him underneath the basket doing drills and stuff. So here is a kid that is 6'6", he's fourteen years old, got eyes light up like this, oh my god I got another Green, man, you know. He's looking, so that is how he got into Power and eventually he became an all-city player, because he was so smart and he worked so hard. You know everything he would tell me he would soak up. I mean he was just so tough you know, and he wasn't afraid that was the one thing. Because Tom McMillan, when he got the scholarship to Maryland, Lefty recruited him and Lefty comes and says well you got to talk to Howie Evans to get that kid. I said you aren't talking to me, I'm not telling him where to go to school. (laughter) You better go talk

to his mother and father, his mother you know. I am not telling him where to go to school, all these people recruiting you know talk to his mother. You know I said, you know he asked me about the coaches but I didn't tell him. I said you know I don't think that much of Giselle as a coach but it's a good school. You know close to home, which is what he wanted. You know so he eventually went there.

MN: Now where you living in the Bronx when you were working in Queens at that time?

HW: No, no I, or was I living in the Bronx then? I don't know, I can't remember.

MN: Now, did you have, when you were playing basketball at Morris, did you have contact with Floyd Lane at PS 18? And Hilton White and those guys?

HW: Oh no, they weren't at 18, there was no 18 then. I mean they were, Floyd Lane when I was playing, Floyd Lane was -

Man: Started CCNY?

HW: Yes, but he was getting, he was trying to get his life in order. Because remember they had the scandal.

Man: Oh the scandal so that was later when he got to 18?

HW: Yes, but he was trying to get his life, we all started like working in the schools. Yes, Floyd was like a mentor before me because when I started playing basketball my game was so advanced at that point that I was always playing with the older guys. So Floyd Lane would take me around to play with them. And he was the one that integrated me with the older guys. I never, after I was like sixteen or seventeen I never played with guys my age, I always played with guys who were older. And then guys like Walter Dukes and Ray Felix and guys like that, I was playing with them because of Floyd Lane, because he took me around.

MN: Now was Floyd from that Prospect Ave area?

HW: Floyd lived up the block from me. We lived on Prospect Avenue.

MN: And he lived -

HW: He lived on one block of Prospect, I lived on the other block. And Floyd came from a West Indian family, his family was West Indian.

MN: And so you, when, how old were you when you first met him?

HW: I'd say, I guess I was about eighteen or nineteen.

Man: How old was he?

HW: I don't know he was about six or seven years older or something like that.

MN: Now, when did you first meet Hilton White, who was like Bubba's you know coach?

HW: Well Hilton had two jobs also, like all of us did then. Hilton worked for the Parks Department. And then at night time he worked in the community centers. So, Hilton took organizing teams to a higher level because he didn't have to run the center, he just came in to run like the basketball. So, he got more involved in really organizing and getting guys to play. And that, Hilton was working I think with 124.

Man: 120.

HW: 120, he was working at 120. I was at 60, PS 60.

MN: Now what blocks were those, where was 60 located?

HW: 60 was in the Bronx on Stebbins Avenue, right off of Westchester, between Westchester and Dawson St.

Man: 120 was on Caldwell, and so we was the dominant programs in the Bronx.

MN: 60, 20, and -

HW: 18 wasn't in the picture at that point.

MN: And that became -

HW: 18 never really became you know like dominant, like 60 and 120 and all. Because they really didn't have, they didn't have a real good strong teacher there until Floyd came there. But Floyd didn't really coach then, because he was director of the program. And Tiny never really played for 18 at that time, remember he never really played at 18.

MN: Where did he play?

HW: He was there but he didn't play.

MN: Oh he didn't play basketball?

HW: Yes, he played, he was playing from the time he was eleven years of age. But for some reason he wasn't playing in the center, I don't know why.

Man: He does a lot of playing with Chick Stewart.

HW: Yes, Chick Stewart that is where I first saw him with a guy named Chick Stewart. I first saw him with, playing he was eleven years old but we were playing outdoors in the summertime.

MN: Uh-huh, now let me ask you something, you know this is a time when New York City had the best basketball in the country is that fair to say?

HW: Yes.

MN: And do you think the community centers were very much responsible for having this number of great players?

HW: I would say the community centers were almost, in terms of developing all of the in particular, the basketball kids who came out, I would say that they were the dominant factor. Just like the AAU programs are now. Because the reason why the NCAA and the high school coaches are at war is that in New York City the high school coaches can't coach kids during the summertime. Legally the Board of Ed won't let them. So the kids would turn it over to us. So we became the dominant people in their lives, because the coaches would see them

from October to Christmas time, but after Christmas then the season was over unless you went to the playoffs. So we had the kids all of that, for nine months out of the year.

MN: Eight, nine month of the year.

HW: It wasn't just at night time -

MN: And did the college coaches know that? You know that -

HW: Oh yes.

MN: That the community center people were the key?

HW: Yes, see because the recruiting was different and the coaches would come to the schools, they would come to the playgrounds, and so forth. They didn't have all of the restrictions that they had now. And the high school coaches at Christmas time all they wanted to do was get out of school and go up to the mountains, go wherever they were going. And when June 30 came they were the first ones out of the building. And that is the way it is now, because what you have now in New York City is like it was forty years ago. You had science teachers coaching basketball to hustle some money. Or you had a shop teacher doing something, who knew nothing about the sport. Wherein as basketball became more national in scope, if you go in the state of Florida, state of Texas and all, high school coaches are hired like college coaches. If you don't win, you get fired. You know and you are expected to win, you are not expected to be a classroom teacher, you see. So you are like an extended teacher, you're teaching a skill to kids who want to play basketball. We don't have that, today we don't have that in New York, we still don't have that in New York. Basketball at the AAU programs, which I started the AAU program, the national AAU program I started, I founded it in 1973.

MN: Wow, um now -

Man: We had professional players would come to play in the community centers right?

HW: Oh yes, yes.

Man: And they instructed kids, and they wouldn't be looking for a fee to do it.

HW: No, that is how they stayed in shape.

Man: Right, a lot of professional players would come play.

HW: Yes.

Man: A lot of professional players would come to play pickup games.

HW: Yes, the Easter time tournaments, all the time.

Man: And Ray Hodge, what was his relationship to community centers? Did he have one?

HW: Ray Hodge who came from -

Man2: Patterson.

HW: Patterson, none.

Man: No Rodney Parker, excuse me sorry.

HW: Rodney Parker.

Man2: Oh Rodney Parker from Brooklyn.

HW: Oh Rodney Parker wasn't a player.

Man: I know, but he moved a lot of players around.

HW: He moved, well he got involved with the basketball a little later on. He got involved in basketball in the late sixties, early seventies.

Man2: With the Kings brothers.

HW: Yes, when he saw that there was money to be made by bringing coaches in, because we had a lot of coaches who still had a fear of coming into the Harlems of our city. So he became the conduit.

Man: The go-between.

HW: Yes, but he wasn't the first one now. You know there was a guy named Jack Malinas who did that, who got caught up in the, who killed the collegiate careers of not just Connie Hawkins and Roger Brown, but a lot. They were just the two most prominent. You know but he crushed a lot of careers, of coming into the community and taking kids out. Then there was a guy named Fred Steggler, we called him the spook. He was a guy who mainly came to the community and dragged guys out there, took them to junior colleges all over the place.

MN: Now when did you become aware of the Rucker tournament? As a major like venue, how-

HW: Well, I was involved in the Rucker Tournament. I refereed in it, I coached in it, I played in it, in the Rucker. But Holcomb Rucker and I were very close. His teams then, I was working in the Bronx at PS 60, he was working out at St Phillips. And he would bring five teams up, once a week to play up at PS 60 because we had this gym and he didn't have a gym available. So he would bring his kids up to the Bronx to play, and we would play all night. We would play the little guys, the younger guys, and the older guys and we would play like five games. We'd be all day and all night in the gym playing, and all. When Holcomb Rucker died in 1965, we formed a committee, when I say we Ollie formed a committee, like in three hours. And the goal was to keep the Rucker Tournament going, the Rucker league going, it was like eight of us on the Holcomb Rucker Memorial Committee. And he lived in, he was a Bronx guy, but he spent all of his time in Harlem.

MN: He lived in the Bronx? Is he also from Prospect Avenue?

HW: 222nd St.

MN: Oh, so yes that's up, ok.

HW: Yes he lived on 222nd St.

Man: Howie I remember playing in the classic. In the Holcomb Rucker Memorial Classic, I think it was down in Wagner.

HW: Right.

Man: Right, right that is where I played him.

HW: That was the first time, and all. So yes, Holcomb and I were very close. I was on the, after we ensured that the tournament was going to be continued and Bob McCullough came home from school and he started running the tournament. And.-

MN: Now Bob, was Bob McCullough from the Bronx?

HW: Harlem. He was one of the kids that Rucker used to bring up, and he was involved in getting Bob into the prep school, Laurinburg.

MN: Laurinburg, right.

HW: And then into Benedict where Bubba went and all.

MN: When did you start doing sports writing in New York City? When did you start writing for the Amsterdam News? Or were you writing for somebody else before?

HW: No I never, no I didn't. Wilt Chamberlain who was a dear friend of mine throughout basketball, because when I went to school there were, our team was made up, I was the only guy from New York. But the best players on the team were from Philadelphia and Washington. And the Washington guys were always ragging about Elgin Baylor and the Philadelphia guys were always bragging about Wilt Chamberlain. And, at that time we were like two years ahead of both of them. And so we said we are going to settle this argument. So after the basketball season we jump in two cars, we drove up to Philadelphia and, you know we played these games against Wilt and his guys and so forth. But Wilt I had already known because he had played on the 1953 YMCA, Christian St. YMCA Championship, National Championship team, when we had lost in the regional

championship. And he played on that team, he was the youngest guy on the team, but he didn't play center he was a shooting forward. He was 7' 1" but he was, he didn't have the skills to play center.

Man: The original Derrick Newinsky.

HW: Yes, good example, yes. (laughs). So and then the following weekend we drove to Washington and played against Elgin Baylor whom I didn't even know his name was Elgin, we called him Rav, he was always Rav. It was for years until I saw he was on the picture of a magazine later on, Elgin Baylor. I said oh that's Rav, because it was Rav Ravin for short. Because this guy I mean he could chunk, and he had this little skip, like the guys do now. You know how these guys do it, he was doing that.

MN: And he also had that, like a twitch.

HW: Plus, well he had a nervous condition, so he would twitch. And guys used to think that it was fake.

Man: Fake.

HW: (laughs) He had a medical condition, and some guys called him tick. And he would go, he'd be holding the ball and he would go -

Man: And they thought that was a fake, right ok, alright.

HW: No he wasn't faking.

Man2: I never knew that.

HW: And that used to kill us. (laughter) You know, and he had a medical condition.

Man: That was always his first move with the ball.

HW: You know but he was you know, I never had to guard him because he was so big. You know even when he was in high school, when these guys were in high school this guy was, I mean this guy was playing against men, man, he was a tremendous player. You know, but

yes, those, that so what happened was, because I was very friendly with Wilt Chamberlain. And he became, he used to come to New York all the time. And we always used to play out at Mt. Morris, he would just drive up and we would play in Mt. Morris Park on 120th St. So, they were dogging him in the newspapers and in the magazines, they would write all these horrible stories about him right. And I was infuriated you know I was like, then I was really what you call, not a rebel but what's the other word?

MN: Agitator?

Man: Radical.

HW: Not radical.

Man: Revolutionist.

HW: No, what is it called, Rap Brown and those guys, damn what's the word?

MN: Not a Panther?

HW: No it's a regular word.

Man: Radical.

HW: No the opposite of radical. Militant.

MN: Militant.

HW: Militant, well in those days, they had the white groups, they had the black groups. Well each group did the same thing but they called the white guys radicals and called us militants. We were militants and they were radicals, we were the same thing, ok. So I was considered a militant at that point. So I said, I'm going to write a story. So I wrote a story in reaction to what all these magazine people were writing about Wilt Chamberlain. And I took it down to the Amsterdam News and they were like, you're going to say this? You want to say this? And they published the story. So when the story came out it got such a great reaction, I was leaving the center one night because then I was living in Harlem and moved to

Harlem. And Cal Ramsey had just started, had gotten out of school. He was teaching at PS 52 in the Bronx, over there by Leggett Avenue. So I'm driving down and somebody was driving him, he was in a car because he never drove. And he rolls the window down and he says man that was a great story in the paper. That was the first acknowledgement that somebody gave me of writing a story, was Cal Ramsey. And I saw him at a stop light in a car. So a week later the editor of the paper called me asked me if I wanted to like contribute every week to the paper, so that is how I started.

MN: Wow, and this is in, is this in the late 60's? Or -

HW: 1964.

MN: It started in 1964?

HW: 1964, that is when I wrote that story.

MN: And then you became a weekly columnist?

HW: Then I became a columnist and a writer. Because in 1965 I started covering the Jets, and I was the only black sports writer covering professional football.

MN: Wow. So you were at this time, you were, you were doing the Jets you were in the community center. And were you also teaching in the school?

HW: I was, I had stopped teaching in the school, I had stopped teaching.

MN: So it was the community center and the writing.

HW: I wasn't, well we didn't, well the school I was at wasn't a community center. Then I started Wagner, it was a youth and adult program. And I was the director, and I had, I had the building broken up into classes. I had GED programs, I had, I could always tell when there was unrest in foreign countries because the classes would reflect that, with the people leaving their countries and coming. And they all wanted to learn to speak English, we had the English program and all of that.

MN: Ok, so where is this located the Wagner center?

HW: That's on 120th and 1st Ave.

MN: Ok, now was Cal Ramsey a Bronx person?

HW: No, no he was Harlem.

MN: Ok now what about Bob Williams?

HW: Bob Williams was a Bronx guy.

MN: Where did he, what high school did come out of?

HW: Roosevelt. Bob Williams was a baseball player, he loved baseball. He loved baseball, he played baseball before basketball. He was a great baseball player, and then because he started getting big, big, big, and he ended up in NYU.

Man: Howie, all the great boxers that came out of your program at Wagner. Yes, Golden Glove boxers out of Wagner.

HW: Yes.

MN: So you had a boxing program there also?

HW: It was, the program was the largest program at the time of its kind in the state of New York. They had television people always come there doing stories but it was the type of program that probably I could have done for the rest of my life, if not for the political unrest in the community, because we did so many things there other than the educational thing. But we had the programs you know for the kids, we had the boxing program, the state held their weight lifting, Mr. New York -

MN: Now this is 120th and 1st, that, were there still Italians around there?

HW: Oh yes. Yes.

MN: And so when you talk about the political unrest in the community, what is that?

HW: Well what happened was that the, the Hispanics mostly then, East Harlem and El Barrio, they were mostly Puerto Ricans. And most of them came to the school, Hector Camacho was in our program, and all. But there came a point where there was a kid who I hired who went to City College, and I hired him to teach swimming. He became, he became involved with FALN. He was the kid, and I am sure you guys probably won't recall this. But he was the kid who was handcuffed by the cop, after he was one of the guys who blew up the tavern down in the village.

MN: Oh Fraunces Tavern.

HW: Down, Fraunces Tavern.

MN: Ok.

HW: So, they caught this guy and he was in jail right, and had handcuffs on him. But the thing is, he had blown his hands off making bombs out in Queens. So they had handcuffs on him up here. The guy got out of jail, they had him down at Center St. He escaped jail, and went out this window. Now if you could picture a guy with handcuffs on, going through a window- how he got out to this day remains a mystery. He was at large for many, many years you know, for many, many years. And it wasn't until three years ago that he turned up in Cuba. And it was a big story.

MN: And this is your swimming coach?

HW: This was the guy, swimming coach. But he became very radical because he was talking about, he was saying that the Puerto Ricans were going to take over now. And they, the thing that kept our program going was, we had the Black Panthers in there, we had the Five Percenters, we had the Muslims, we had everybody, I mean everybody. So, therefore when there were problems it did not become a problem, because of our relationship with all these groups. When they talked about the breakfast programs, we started the breakfast

programs with the Black Panthers in the school, because the kids were always so terrible early in the morning. And I said you know something is wrong, so I used to sit in the classroom and watch these kids. I said I know what is wrong, these kids are hungry. So we, I started, I got the Black Panthers together and I said look what can you guys do to help these kids. So, and I told them the situation. We started this breakfast program, and eventually the breakfast program spread from school to school in the district, then it became city-wide. Because they found what I saw, that when these kids come to school hungry, after they'd eat at twelve o'clock they were different kids. They were entirely different, they would come to school with knots in their stomachs. So, we brought peace like that, but when it reached the point where we were starting to, where the groups were being pitted against each other and it was going to become Hispanic against Blacks. And it didn't appear that the Board of Education wanted to help you know. And I knew that when I left they were going to close the program down, because nobody else was going to run it, because we had to get the drugs out of the school and out of the neighborhood and all. Which you know which we did, but when I left I knew it would settle the problem. You know because while I was there it wasn't going to get settled in a nice way. So, we left and said it's your program.

MN: Now Howie what I'd like to do because I think there's probably another hour and a half at least, is to wind up with stuff before 1970 and then leave to another interview you know the AAU stuff and all the things that happened in terms of your -

HW: The Bronx.

MN: And also because I want to take you to a good lunch. So do any of you have questions about what we've heard so far, because this is a sign of going up through the late sixties.

Man: One of the questions I had is, it's about the gangs and it's about social environments they provided, and then girls. What, like what was the relationship of girls to the gangs? And

just like what type of community activities did the gangs provide, and then were they more violent than the gangs became later? Like after Vietnam, or during Vietnam?

HW: Yes, the gangs in the early fifties and all, were violent to the point of the weapons that they had at their disposal to use. They were much more, as I said before, they were very well organized. Now the girls were not as integral a part of the gangs then as they are now.

Because what happened then was that those were first generation Hispanics. And you had a lot of first generation African-Americans whose parents had come from the South, and they still had a strong grip on their children. Now, the children of that generation became grandparents. And then the parents of the eighties and nineties, they started changing the values, the family values changed, the family structure changed. Even though there were gangs, there was a family structure. And there was a code of ethics that the gangs had, that they don't have now. We were fighting a gang, and I can't remember which gang it was. But we were on Prospect Ave going towards Southern Boulevard and we were standing on a stoop. And these guys rolled up on us, and the guy got out. The only reason that we didn't get shot down was, the guy's mother was there and these guys, and we didn't have anything in our hands. It was three of us and there was like five guys in this car. Guy gets out and looks over and sees one of the guy's mother, and he says go in there ma. The only way I didn't burn you guys is because your mother is here man. You know he got back in the car and drove off. That wouldn't happen today, see that wouldn't happen today. So there was a kind of a code that existed then. You didn't hit girls then, you didn't rob a woman, you didn't take a woman's pocketbook. Those things were unheard of, within the gang structure and outside of the gang structure. Because if a gang member went and stole someone's purse, a mother's purse, he was ostracized. First you would get his butt whipped, then he was ostracized. So that you know, even though these guys, you know you got guys when I

take kids, used to take kids up to the prisons, take kids up to play and then I used to take entertainers up to the prisons up to Sing-Sing and over to Rikers and so forth. I'd walk in there's all these guys I know. I took Jim Brown, you know Jim Brown has this Amer-I-Can program which he goes into prisons around the country. And -

MN: Yes, the football player.

HW: Football player yes, and well I had known Jim you know, through football and so forth. I had recruited his son to play basketball and all. So, he called me and asked me about the prison. So he came up for two days and we went into all these prisons, around upstate, down, we were down here. So we go into the prison, and here are all these gangs, and some guys who had been in there for like twenty-five or thirty years for stuff they shouldn't have even served that much time. That is something else; they were there. So, the jails were broken down into the gangs just like they had just left the streets, the same way, the same guys. The guys who were in charge on the streets were the guys in charge in the jail. So the structure didn't change in the jail, the guys who had beefs against guys on the street took those beefs into the prisons. So you had the Hispanic gangs, you had the young Hispanic gangs. Then you had the older Hispanic gangs, you had the younger Hispanic gangs who were fighting the older guys for control, and you had the same thing with the other guys. But then you mix that with the Five Percenters, there was a group of guys called the Five Percenters who were trying to become so much involved in this gang structure. So when we go into the prison, it's like everybody's yelling: "Hey Howie!!" So Jim Brown turns around—

(END OF SESSION.)