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Himmelstein, Paul

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Mark Naison (MN): Paul Himmelstein a great Doo-Wop singer from the Morrisania neighborhood and it's November 11th and we are at Fordham University.

MN: Paul Tell us a little about your family and how - - were you born in the Bronx?

Paul Himmelstein (PH): Yes. I was born at Prospect and Jennings Street I'm one of fourteen children, I'm number eleven as I previously said and it was a family orientated neighborhood. I mean, there were a few big families and we were one of them. Like I said, we were fourteen but the Chandlers, there was a family called the Chandlers, they had seventeen and the Browns had ten. The Elis - - they had nine so I'm just giving names of the top of my head, which of course Eli - one of them sang with me the base, he was he bass and then Bobby Higgs he had ten in his family.

MN: Now when your family first moved to Jennings and Prospect

PH: I was born. [Crosstalk]

MN: They moved there before you were born.

PH: I think I must have - -I accidentally - -I really thought I was born on Prospect and Jennings Street and one time I had to get a birth certificate for a reason I forget for school or something, and I noticed that I was born on Bathgate Avenue; but obviously they moved then because I was number eleven like I said and they probably needed a bigger place. So I only know about the Prospect and Jennings Street.

MN: And your father was a cab driver?

PH: Well he used to drive a truck and delivering live poultry during the week and he drove a cab on the weekend, he worked seven days a week.

MN: Was your, were both of your parents Jewish?

PH: Yes.

MN: Were their parents immigrants? How long have you -

PH: Well my grandmother, on my mother's side, I believe yes. I believe, they weren't born here because as a matter of fact my mother was born on the way here, I think in Austria.

MN: Right. Now did your parents speak Yiddish? Or?

PH: Yes. My mother could, my father could, if I remember when they had little arguments over stupid thing around the house type of stuff, you pick up - - it is funny they always say you learn the bad words in most people's language, so- called bad words, so I learned a few Jewish words that way; but I - - all in all they got along we didn't have a like an abusive type of father or family thing going on in there.

MN: How many rooms was the apartment that -

PH: Six rooms. It was like the dining room was also the living room, it was that type of apartment and you had a long foyer that led from the entrance of the door, if you keep walking down this long foyer you walk into the dining room which is also again the living room we had a gigantic, a gigantic table there handed down from my father's side of the family. I'm sure today it's worth thousands. We did not know the value even then it was probably worth something. But that's where we watched TV, that's where we listened to the radio, before TV and things like that.

MN: Now what are your earliest memories of sort of the neighborhood when you were three four years old?

PH: Well I remember you could sit, - - you can hang out - - your mother could sit I mean late summer nights, you could sit on the stoop while you played in front of the building with your friends. I remember my sister buying me a rocking horse. I never forgot that. There was a shoe maker they also had little toys in there on the corner of the building and

she went in there and bought me this rocking horse -- and I hope four and not twenty four then, make a fool out of myself but I must have been about four or something like that.

Anyway, but it was a kind of neighborhood where you played games street games always street games, with the chalk on the ground stoopball.

MN: Stoop ball.

PH: Yes stoop ball. Hand ball. Yes the whole thing. Sometime you had a one neighborhood playing against another neighborhood - -I never really got into that because I guess I wasn't sporty enough I never got pick with things like that. Once or twice I did because they were short handed, so they had no choice but to take me. They needed another guy for second base or something but there was a lot of that going on ringalevio these are old games. You made scooters from a from a skate. These were some of the toys we had, you could make things back then, you take one skate large or small thing with the key, the skate key. Yes, you took a board like so, and you put the skate, you tie, you bang the skate with a nail and stuff and you built it with a milk crate on top and everybody designed theirs. These were the kind of toys we had. Even in Halloween, there'd be a gang of people when you went around trick or treating we would go to the Wilkins Avenue Market and the trick or treat days.

MN: Now where was Wilkins Avenue? Is that down this hill?

PH: Yes. Down that steep hill, there was a steep hill. I'd say is about four to five blocks from where I grew up.

MN: It's a little closer to Southern Blvd?

PH: Yes. The train station there is Freeman Street train station and Southern Blvd was further down.

MN: What was the Wilkins Market like when you?

PH: It was a Jewish market, the whole area. the Wilkins Avenue area - Wilkins and Jennings Street. It was a big shopping area just like - - Bathgate Avenue was, but we lived near that market and the five and ten was there all along Wilkins Avenues were stores, there were Jewish delis, restaurants, - - my mother shopped there and we came from school and - - where's mom the door was always open in an unlocked way you can just walk in, nobody locked their doors.

MN: Nobody locked their doors.

PH: That's right. And many times I went home nobody was in the house and I'd be calling for my mother , but she might have been down I - - from common knowledge, she was down in the neighbor's there visiting, they might be watching some soap operas, or something like that back in the day. This is - - I'm talking about now when TV showed up. We were one of the first people in our area on the block to get a TV. My father, he hit the number I think he won about five hundred dollars; [laughter] yes five hundred dollars, and next thing we know one day, they delivered this three way combination the screen was about this big back then and it was a record player and a radio. You opened up the door it was that type thing and - - that was like back then I'll tell you the truth that was like going to the movies in your house [laughter] because instead of waiting for Saturday, and the shows that they had on the radio I remember them but sitting around the radio in my house and you made it your business to get up stairs - - Oh the Fat Man is coming on, or The Shadow, things like that and you sat there with potato chips and things like that, around the radio listening to these dramas and stuff.

MN: was this like just after World War II? Or--

PH: Well I will say part - - during World War II.

MN: Now do you remember air raid drills?

PH: Yes - - my father - - yes I do I remember the sirens going off and I remember everybody had to shut their light - - my father went downstairs - - he was an air raid warden that I only knew that because one time I looked out the window and he be talking shut your lights, shut your lights, shut your lights, and it was my father standing in the middle of the gutter pointing at people shut you lights, shut your lights and all that stuff and he was like an air warden volunteer type of thing because he went to the service but they - he went in the service when he was too young and his mother protested it and they had to let him out because he was too young to be in the service. But I'm speaking previous to when I was born. This is just hearsay from my family to me.

MN: Now was your family religious, did they go to Senegal?

PH: Part of it well, let's just say my grandparents were. My mother and my father spoke, they spoke the language but they didn't really speak it on a basis of everyday speak, conversation. They spoke the language - -I was going to say in annoyance sometimes they say a Jewish word like you are getting on my nerves in Jewish. Just I guess out of habit, to each other, but basically - - they were American. My father was born here as far as I know. My mother was born in Austria but she was like this.

MN: Were your family political at all? Did they - -?

PH: No. My father was just struggling to put food on the table for all of us. He worked seven days a week like I told you. Then he got - - he hurt his wrist one time and he couldn't lift those crates. Years after - - years of working as a truck driver with live

poultry he used to deliver. I remember him taking me out to where he worked to brag about his son, I was on TV. I think I showed you a previous picture.

MN: Right.

PH: So.

MN: Now when you first were like three or four was the neighborhood still mostly white or did some?

PH: I saw, yes I remember let's call it flash back type memory - -I remember my sisters looking out the back yard window yelling to their friends "Doris meet me down stairs" thing like that and they were like in the buildings next door, there were always some white people there - - by this time there were a lot of black people but it wasn't dominated. It was still a white-Jewish kind of neighborhood. But I was so young I never had white friends by the time I was old enough let just say -

MN: By the time you were five or six it was a mostly black?

PH: That's right.

MN: - Neighborhood

PH: Yes. All my friends, like in my age bracket they were like, the super was black, and so on like that. And there were blacks and Spanish. But Freeman Street was like basically the Spanish area.

MN: Really, there was the Spanish?

PH: Well do not get me wrong there Spanish that lived within my areas but predominate, I'm speaking. If you really if you wanted to go more predominate places like where the most Spanish people are, as opposed to the most black, as opposed to the most white.

MN: Right.

PH: Freeman Street and Wilkins Avenue

MN: Right.

PH: Where the Jewish market was.

PH: That area down there it became predominantly Spanish as I was getting older

MN: Down the hill?

PH: Yes. Down the hill of Jennings Street and my surroundings were my building, and Jennings Street and the area Boston Road.

MN: Right

PH: Were pretty much - - as I got older mind you when I could leave the block - - were black - - some Spanish in between and they were like I said yes they really go a few blocks away to find still - - a white family here and there but eventually they were gone.

MN: What got you into singing? How did how did this start for you?

PH: Well back then, they used to have - - besides the rag man - - this is a day when the rag man used to come around and collect rags and sing.

MN: Was it – (singing) Any old clothes.

PH: Yes they used to have people singing in the back yards and you'd throw money down to them.

MN: Really

PH: Yes. This goes before my time but into my time as a child.

MN: They were singing for money?

PH: For money, yes. There were people that would come in the back yard - - you'd hear a voice singing - - you open up the window - -I lived on the first floor but the back yard it was as if we were on the fourth floor.

MN: It looked down.

MN: Was there grass or concrete?

PH: Concrete. Concrete.

MN: This was concrete. Somebody would come there and then would sing?

PH: Yes. There were people - - occasionally I remember someone singing in the backyard. Yes and people would open their windows and they were like - - it must have been common to them as opposed to me knowing what was going on and I remember looking at it. I'd see a man singing and people would throw money down there - - change and stuff.

MN: Now, did they throw it down because the guy was good or they wanted help somebody in need?

PH: Well you could speculate on that, I was too young to think that way let's put it like that when it was happening. I believe both because I don't remember the person sounding bad and - - we are talking forties, during the forties, early forties and so - - that was one thing and then I don't even remember how it got discovered that I could sing. - - My brother Larry, who was a year older than me, he was known as the singer in the family - -I mean I remember times there were people knocking on our door, "Call your brother out here! I want, let him sing! We want to hear him sing!" Larry, and he would go in the hallway, he used to make me laugh, but he could sing. See I was kind of shy in that way where he wasn't - - and he would go out there and start singing in the hallway because some guys would come up, friends of ours, they'll bring some other s and say, "This guy could sing." That kind of a thing.

MN: Now was singing even before the rock n roll days, something that was going on a lot? Did a lot of people sing?

PH: Well I couldn't speak for no one else but I know what happened was - - my mother sang around the house while she was doing things and you just came and went, I didn't sit down and listen to her sing like it was a show; it was taken for granted ,she's singing she'll be singing with the radio . Songs that - - let's call it Doris Day type stuff, Eddie Fisher kind of song, because eventually, that's when I did start singing. Those were the songs that were coming on my radio. MN: That was the pop. It wasn't rhythm and blues.

PH: Yes pop, and I don't really - - to be honest, like I said my brother was known to be the one could sing cause he would sing publicly. - - I don't mean on stage but he would sing! And people noticed he had a nice voice and he - - the point they would ring out bells - - "Call your brother Larry I want - - I've got to hear him sing." And I would tell Larry they want you outside your friends want you, they want you to sing, and he would come out. - - at that time it was not known whether I could sing or not. I don't even remember if I thought I could sing.

MN: Yes.

PH: And I can't honestly tell you when I discovered as a person who could sing but it turned out that I had a little better voice than him.

MN: [laughter]

PH: And he could sing

MN: Right

PH: But obviously I was the one in the family who was a little more blessed in that way and no one knew it.

MN: Now was this something that people found out in school did kids sing in school?

PH: Yes, I sang in school and yes it was found out - -I sang in school a couple of times in elementary school in front of an audience I used to get embarrassed too, they knew I could sing and the teacher - - I'm going back to like fifth grade and stuff like that. They'd want me to come up in front the class and sing and I remember it embarrassed me a little. If I was like shy like the shy kid - -I - - don't want to do that - - but then I did it and - - so you get known in the school as the kid that could sing and in some ways it makes you popular.

MN: Now you went to PS 54?

PH: Yes

MN: What street was that on?

PH: Right on Freeman Street.

MN: Freeman -

PH: The corner of Freeman and Wilkins.

MN: Ok, down the hill.

PH: But it was further down the block heading in the direction of Southern Blvd.

MN: Ok.

PH: It was between Southern Blvd and Freeman Street.

MN: Now was that a racially mixed school?

PH: Yes because there was still like I said pockets of white people. They just weren't near where I lived, because some of them lived, let's say the other side of Freeman Street, those neighborhoods that I didn't go to. Obviously they had their kids - - white families

there and - - like I said I call it pockets of white people here, there, here but from where I lived we are talking about ten fifteen blocks away.

Brian Purnell: May I ask a question please?

PH: Sure.

BP: I know that you were very young and it was still predominantly African American but did anyone ever talk about why white people were moving away?

PH: Not to me. I'll be honest with you. I didn't pay attention to it to be honest with you.

By the time - - let's just say - - by the time - - I'm talking I was really young the people on my block - I knew there were white people in the next building because my sisters like I said , when I was a little kid, I might have been like two or three years old. I'm guessing at the age, and I would hear my sisters calling out the backyard window to their girl friends who I saw were white. I had to be so young that I couldn't go nowhere without being watched. At that age when my sister bought me a rocking horse, you got to be real young for someone to buy you a rocking horse, so - - but I remember like I said flashes of that now - - the one name I used earlier - - my sister had a friend named Doris - -I do not know why I just remembered my older sister calling their name out but I could not tell you any other names because I never really paid attention. But there were white people still living in the next building. But when I went into the street, when I was in the street as a little boy, my mother was out there sitting on the stoop with other neighbors, they were black, they were black. So I believe it was becoming predominantly more black but there was still white around I just did not pay attention, because you're just a little boy, you're not watching things like that.

MN: When did you start developing a street personality that became your kind of, how old were you when you started like with the joking and the verbal stuff and like becoming funny?

PH: OK. I had to be like about maybe twelve, eleven, twelve, I would guess. By this time maybe even a little earlier I would say roughly maybe from eight years old. Because by that time I really didn't see any white people anywhere, it was all black and some were Spanish with dark skin, so I didn't know whether anyone was Spanish or African. Unless I caught them off guard speaking Spanish to someone, other than that they because they had no accent. These were just my friends, these were neighborhood people, we were all - - everybody spoke English nobody really spoke with any accents except southern, a little bit. And then these were people I was around everyday coming up with and, I never thought of it, or even tried to emulate but when you are growing up in an area, any area, and I can speak as a more mature person now, it's a natural thing that you are going to sound like your surroundings, ok - -I knew of a white family years later back in recent years. They spoke fluent Spanish, they were Italian, they lived near Fordham Road, and by coincidence their last name was Chico, believe it or not, but they weren't Spanish. Every one of them spoke fluent Spanish.

MN: Yes

PH: Ok, I use them as an example, only to say that when me and my brothers - - my sisters kind of - - they had black friends but they still had some of their white friends. They were the older ones, so they were growing up when there were white people, mostly white. And they - - some of them stuck with their friends even though their friends moved out of the neighborhood, but they still had contact with them. By the time I was at a

young age like seven eight years old something like that, six. All I saw was black people and like I said even before then, even earlier I mostly say black people. Some of them might have been Spanish, - - but that's what's what I saw I didn't see any white people.

MN: Right

PH: Ok, as time got on and I could kind of move from the stoop, let's just say, on my own, I was a little older. Because I could remember my mother opening the windows just like they show in them old fashioned movies. [Laughter] My friends used to tease us too. "Paul, Larry," yelling out the window "get up stairs - - its seven o'clock - - get up stair before I break your legs." [Laughter] Oh man, she does not know you are involved in the street game, it could be ringalevio , it could be in a lot of things . They are street games you played, like hand - - slug, handball, things like that. You don't want to leave now you're in the midst of something. "Alright I will be right home you tell your mother things like that. "I want you - -you got ten minutes" and she will be back at the window again "I said get up the stairs now before I break your legs" and that was like - - so my friends used to hear that and they used to tease us - "Paul you better get upstairs or your mother is going your break your leg?" - - but she wasn't that type of person, she just - - that's the way she spoke. . Anyway so [laughter] but - - we used to be teased at any given time because there were a lot of us but I took it for what it was worth, it was a joke. - - Everybody's parents had their little - - they're way of talking to their kids. It's time to eat, it's time to get upstairs, it's school tomorrow, all that stuff. And so - - like I said I had a lot of fun growing up where I grew up, I didn't notice or ever think about, where's the white people? I didn't think like that, and neither did my friends who were growing up with me. They didn't address us, as you are white or anything like that. We were just taking each

other for granted. This is our block, our neighborhood. I walked through other neighborhoods that I didn't live, as I got older, but you could tell I'm used to the place I'm at, and I walked with an attitude like even though it's not my block it's my neighborhood like nine was like blocks away in a different area. PS99 - - became - - and this one lady from around the corner Dot Holiday I always mention her name give her a little fame in a fifteen minute fame. She went up one time - - when they knew I could sing - -I they asked - - this was before rock n roll - -I was seen on TV by the neighborhood - and - -one of those kid shows and that's how a lot of them found out that I could sing - - like I said my brother was always the one that was known to sing because he would sing on the street in front of everybody he didn't care, I wouldn't, I was shy that way. But, then they found out that I could sing, by seeing me on TV and I think I had to be in a picture that I have here maybe eight, nine years old and I sang P.S. I Love You. As a matter of fact that Ed Sullivan picked me there was a talent show.

MN: Yes.

PH: And - - there was a kid talent show on TV and they had Ed Sullivan on the phone to pick the winner, and I had won that time so I got a write up in the paper and my picture, that was the prize.

MN: Yes.

PH: And so I was known that I could sing and people didn't know that about me even though they saw me every day in the street; they just didn't know that I could sing

MN: Right

PH: And - - Dot Holiday she came up to my house and knocked on the door and asked my mother could I take Paulie, little Paulie - - that what she called me - -I was a little kid, to

the community center we have a talent show - - she said don't worry I'll bring him home - - that's how young I was - - so I'm guessing at my age being eight or something like that -- she said don't worry I'll bring him home - - nothing will happen to him. So my mother said yes. So I went down there, they wanted me to be in their show.

MN: So this is at PS 99 the night center.

PH: It became a production place, it was called The Cosmopolitan, this was called The Cosmopolitan and it was a mixture of performance, but the name of the whole like a production type of thing. Some interpretive dancing, Dot was one of the people who did it and Ivy, Chandler, my friend Ray Chandler, that's his sister in law, she was married to his brother Gordon and - - not then but years later. We were all kids then but they were older and I was the little kid, I was always considered the little kid. Plus I always had a young look even when I was the same age as someone I looked like I was little kid to them . So she took me down to 99, first time I was ever there, and this is about the time like I said I could just- -just about get off the block , go around the corner with some friends. Those were the days when my mother would call out the window "time to come up" "your mother is calling you" , anyway and I had sang on TV and I won and some of the neighborhood saw it, came up asked my mother. My mother said yes. I went down there and I sang on stage in the auditorium, they had a show, like I said it was a whole production they was interpretive dancing, conga playing guys, there was a piano in the auditorium.

MN: And this is in the late forties or the early fifties?

PH: No. this was like late forties, between middle and late forties.

MN: And they had a conga player too.

PH: Congo player, there was a piano, they had a piano, the stage - - you had to go up some steps on the side of the stage to get on - - this was an auditorium of the school, and alongside one of the stairwells to go up to the stage there was a piano, so you were like backed up by instruments and there was a conga players and I think somebody played the sax, I don't remember exactly. But mostly you did a lot of acappella because nobody knew what you were going to do. And not everybody actually knew the song so that they could back you up so you kind of were almost unrehearsed , the person would ask what key you sing?, well I do not about keys. Why you asking me a key? Here is - - this is where I was going to sing and I'd give my sample where I was going start out, how was going to start out, you figure out the keys. I don't know about that stuff, music, [Laughter] and it was the truth. So - -and - - that's how I learned about an arpeggio ding ding ding [singing] that's arpeggio [Laughter] I started learning then

MN: Yes

PH: That' what they called it an arpeggio, and he said let's try it here, and you start singing and I'll get an idea what key you are singing. Well I was considered soprano voice as very young kid I had high voice you didn't have kick me [Laughter] I was already soprano sounding so and then - - I'll get on stage and the auditorium was filled with people - the school auditorium. I sang P.S. I Love You, I had certain road songs let's just call it that I did well, "Rags to Riches" things like that, and I was seen by the neighborhood, the surrounding areas - - people - - they knew there was talent show going on and I became part of - - from that point on I became part of The Cosmopolitan.

MN: That was the show.

PH: Yes. The show itself.

MN: And they would do shows.

PH: And periodically we had shows.

MN: Once a year twice a year.

PH: Something like that and I - -so the first couple of times I appeared alone I didn't even know again - -they lived around the corner from me to show how young I was. The group that I sang with, I didn't know them they were older than me at the time and I didn't really know them so, but they were at center, they were just another face in the crowd to me. Little did I know they lived around the corner, cause I could only go so far - -for someone to come and say can I take your son - -I'll bring them home. To give you an idea of how young I was and then - -one day this guy come to my house, this is after the second time I sang there alone - - at the 99, and he told me, "We got a group, we would like you to sing in the group." And I -I will sing - -I'll try it and that's what got me on Jennings Street.

MN: Yes.

PH: Because that's where they lived right around the corner, so I went up - - they came and got me we went to their house - - and I always remember and I've got to say I probably instinctively incorporated it into my singing style, gospel music. It was always - - you can go to anybody's house in them days, if it was a black family; they wasn't really listening to - - there ones I went to - - Eddie Fisher and Perry Como. There would be church music, and gospel.

MN: Really?

PH: Yes. Constantly, it was on their radio, where in my house we would have a station that played Eddie Fisher, Perry Como.

MN: Now did you ever listen to those rhythm and blues stations like where there were those DJ's like Dr. Jive or?

PH: Yes I remember, I did - -I was older then and knew about, by this time I'm signing. Yes, Alan Freed. Sure because later on as I got older, when I say older now I'm like ten, and give or take eleven, and I'm being into - -and I always remember like I said, when I started singing with these guys and I could hear the radio in the house of the person like one of the guys we rehearsed in his house - -songs - -and I could hear that and I liked it, the sound of gospel to this day they are the best singers in the world, gospel singers.

MN: Yes.

PH: They have the best voices.

MN: Really?

PH: In my opinion, I'm speaking for myself, that's just the way that I feel and I didn't know I was doing it and I probably I'm trying to be honest, I didn't plan - - or I'm - -I just liked what I heard.

MN: Now did any of your friends take you to church did you ever go to church?

PH: I've been to churches but not for- - not to go to pray. Yes I've been to church more - - I never really went to a shul, I remember Jewish, - - there were shuls around that area by Crotona Park there was a shul which is now I think an Episcopal Church. There were shuls here, shuls there, on Jennings Street going towards the market.

MN: Right.

PH: There was - - and I remember a Jewish person asking me to shut the lights for him

MN: Right.

PH: On the Sabbath.

MN: Right.

PH: Because they weren't allowed they lit candles - - my grandmother was that kind of a Jew, my mother's mother.

MN: Right.

PH: I remember going to her house, she live on Claremont Parkway which obviously, that's where - -I know - - not obviously but I know that's where my family lived before we came to Prospect and Jennings I know definitely, we came when I was born and obviously really young , right after I was born.

MN: Right.

PH: So that's the only area that I know, I've always said.

MN: Now when you were at PS 54, what was your school experience?

PH: Well again like I said, by the time I was in school at four years old - -you went to kindergarten - - my friends were black, pretty much - I saw white people there and there were some one or two here and there in my class, I could not give you their names because I really stayed with black people because they were from my block.

MN: Right.

PH: See any school you went to you really went to school nearest where you lived even if it's a few blocks away, and I - - so my friends like - - cause we are going back to the same block. You hung out with the people you saw after school.

MN: Yes.

PH: And like I said there were white people there and obviously these were the white people I told you that obviously lived in these pocket areas within the perimeter.

MN: Now were you under pressure to do well in school, when - - in your family was that something?

PH: No. something my mother was so tied up with so many kids doing - -being a mother, housework and laundry, then - - they really didn't - - my father worked all the time he only - - when he came home he slept and there were times that you had to be quiet. My mother said: " Be quiet, your father" - - cause he would get angry and rightfully so later you think rightfully so - - at the time you are just a kid being noisy, jumping on the beds and stuff, playing - - we had - - black friends used to come to my house and we'd go to their house and we play games like little kids do - cowboys, and stuff like - - we did that type of playing and I - - you were just a kid being a kid and with. Only the people who were in my house as friends playing these game were black.

MN: Right. Did you - -were you in the one or two classes in this school?

PH: I started out in kindergarten, like most people did at the time, I don't know if they still do that today, I'm not up with schools.

MN: Yes.

PH: And half of the class was from my block, from Jennings Street and Boston Road, around that way and these were people that I really dealt with my own neighborhood people and - -from kindergarten all the way up the sixth grade you went. But as you're getting older of course.

MN: Yes.

PH: And that was when I started to like - - the early years of course I was four years old when I went to school - - you had to be four years old when you started out at

kindergarten and I got - -I figure I was five or six when I could kind of leave - -not really leave the neighborhood, but go around the corner.

MN: Yes. Now you went to Junior high school 40 after 54.

PH: Yes that was the only school - -we had a swimming pool in 40.

MN: Really?

PH: Yes. That was great because in the summer time 40 because summer school to hang out in you played table hockey and basketball and things like that and there was a swimming pool.

MN: It sounds like kids had a lot of activities in your neighborhood.

PH: They did free lunches; that's another thing.

MN: Really?

PH: Yes but my family, being so large you don't think of yourself as poor when you are growing up, I do not think anybody does - - even today probably. But I remember I was sticking a deck of cards, half a deck cards in my shoes when I had holes, see you got new shoes - - and I was young then - - when my father had to buy shoes for us there was always a few of us at a time that needed it - - remember there are fourteen kids.

MN: Right.

PH: So I rarely, I'd say about the age of thirteen, twelve, thirteen, I started doing things to make money myself to buy my own stuff.

MN: What were the ways that you figured out to make money?

PH: Well one way was old fashioned, even before I was born, you take a big jar with the water and the whisky glass inside, I don't know if you're into that but the water glass,

and you take a shot, you drop the coin in, a nickel in if you get in the glass, you get a dime back.

MN: Yes.

PH: If you don't you lost your nickel, that's simple as that.

MN: Right.

PH: And you did it with pennies well I'll say nickel, but nickel, pennies whatever.

MN: So you made this up.

PH: No I didn't invent it was around even before I was born.

MN: So, you created the game.

PH: Well, I did this in front of my stoop yes, in front of where I lived.

MN: And you have people play and see?

PH: Yes. People play, yes. And you sold Kool Aid that's another thing I did. I wasn't the only kid doing it. This was thing the young people did. I sold Kool Aid, you'd go to the candy store and you buy the little packets of Kool Aid and you made a whole jug of it you threw sugar in it and made it sweet.

MN: Yes

PH: And you just stood in front your building, you put it on top of a milk crate and this is the summer time of course, and you stood [laughter] and you stood there as an entrepreneur

MN: Right.

PH: Kool Aid, let's say the glass was this big, that was five cents, ten cents, something like that and that's how I made money real early in life accumulating a few dollars.

MN: Yes.

PH: And I mean a few and you spend hours at it. Then as I got older I was able to go a little further from my house I noticed - - my mind was inclined to things that were street hustles were ways for some reason and I was around - -I started hanging around people like that, I do not mean bad people now. It's just that they hustled in the streets.

MN: Now did you ever helped out with numbers or anything like that?

PH: Well let's just say, [laughter] let's just say I've played numbers

MN: Yes

PH: Yes. I used to play numbers and I made money that way as I got older, not very older but older, I branched out a little more. I used to go - - let's put it this way I was the kind of kid that went out the house with a couple decks of cards and craps.

MN: Yes.

PH: Dice and - - in my neighbor who ever started the game it was his game, that means you can cut the game.

MN: Really?

PH: Yes.

BP: What does it mean to cut the game?

PH: That means let's - - every time you shuffle you a card let's say with blackjack, for instance, we played on the stoop or in the school yard. It's my game I started it, and I'm talking nickel and dime betting, quarters and as - - sometimes the game used to mushroom and now - - when I say mushroom back then is now it's a fifty cents bet - - someone is betting two dollars, a dollar . By this time I'm like just about a teenager about thirteen. And I'm the guy every time you - - whoever got the bank it was his bank, high card first, who gets the high card gets the bank and you got to pay me. Every time you

shuffle, the first shuffle is free, ok and then after that you've got to give me a quarter every time you shuffle. Now if there are enough people playing and you get to use a lot of cards you get a good amount of shuffling going on out of your pot and you keep it going, and sometimes I played with that money.

MN: Yes

PH: Yes not only cut the game but I would be in the game too and that's how - - I'm not the only one who has done that but other people did it too - -I was allowed, when I say allowed, even by older, the older guys would never mess with it - -I was part of the neighborhood.

MN: Right.

PH: But no one from another neighborhood could ever come in our neighborhood and do things like that.

MN. Right, it was there was real block protective.

PH: Yes, I remember - - I've seen the older guys. When I say they were older guys, they were older guys but being a young teenager they were in their middle twenties and stuff. These guys - - let's just say they were the gangsters of the neighborhood that's to use a term, but they weren't really gangsters but they would see a guy, "who is this?" they wanted to make sure he's not a close friend "I don't know, I don't know." They would just say "What do you think you're doing, you can't cut no game around here." "Oh but I started this game," "you did not start nothing, you better get out of here." That kind of stuff and that's it. Then one of them would take over. It was kind of like that. You could not come to my neighborhood and mess with the different families, you couldn't cut a game or, you know, a crap game or anything like that if you weren't from the block.

MN: Yes.

PH: It's really kind of like that it was a taking for granted and - -me and this other young boy we were in the same age bracket and doing the same thing and he was better player - - if I won let's say if I won a hundred and fifty he won about three hundred, or two hundred and fifty, he was a better hustler. I always gave him credit, Feasta. Now the Feasta family you probably know they had a large family too, there were ten brothers.

MN: Yes.

PH: Ok and Carl and them used to play blackjack with us - - this is going back - -they used to sing in the hallway. By this time everybody knew I could sing, and sometimes they sent word out to find me, just to sing with them in the hallway.

MN: Yes

PH: That hallway echo always made you sound better.

MN: Right.

[END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

PH: Sometimes they'd send word out to find me just to sing with them in the hallway.

You know, the hallways echo always made you sound better. So we used to play, like I said, blackjack, in the school yard of 40 and craps, and at the same time there'd be a full court basketball game going on and you could bet on.

MN: Oh, you could bet on the basketball?

PH: Yeah, you did everything. Let me tell you something -

MN: One second -

[PAUSE]

MN: Now -

PH: We had that kind of a neighborhood.

MN: Did you, was there a neighborhood bookie?

PH: Of course, every neighborhood had a number man. You know, we didn't call them bookies because bookies was some of the white people were, you know, they didn't just take numbers, they took sports so we—

MN: This was strictly numbers?

PH: Strictly numbers, strictly numbers. Yeah, you know you had like numbers and like blackjack and poker, certain games you know. Where I was coming up at so, like I said, certain people could cut games. Sometimes I used to deal for someone when it wasn't my game or wasn't the same for my friend Visa, Donald was his name, Donald Visa, he was the nephew of Carl. They were the big stars of the neighborhood because the early 50's they had a hit, "Shboom." Later on, some white guy or white group made it –

MN: The Cool Cuts?

PH: Yeah, the Cool Cuts. The yadda yadda yadda –

MN: Now when they made that hit, did they come back with big cars through the block?

PH: Yeah, what happened was, yeah, cause it was, I think it must have been like a packet, I think that's what they called it. This big packet, they also went on tours. They were the big stars of the neighborhood. Ralphies in the courts, but they were the Tune Toppers first and then changed their names to the Chords. Keys was a tenor, there was Claudie, Carl's brother, Demetrius, this guy Demetrius, he was a very good bass, I mean really bass bass kind of guy, like, what's his name? He just passed away.

MN: Arthur?

PH: No, not the one Arthur, I'm going about the depth of his voice, the heavy set guy who sang all these love songs.

MN: Luther?

PH: No.

MN: Arthur Price

PH: No.

BP: Barry White.

PH: Barry White, ok there. I couldn't think of his name, I'm terrible with names. You know, you have to realize, I've never been this age before. So I don't know what else is coming. But anyway, yeah, Demetrius was one of the basses, Arthur was a bass in the group, they had about 3 different basses, and I remember like when they used to sing, you know you'd walk up the block and you'd hear singing, and I was heading for the pool room myself—

MN: Now where was the nearest pool room?

PH: Right there on Boston Road and Union Avenue, around the corner of Boston Rd. and Union, between 169th Street and Union, and Union runs into Jennings.

MN: Right, now was the pool hall also a bar?

PH: No, no it was just a pool room.

MN: What was it called?

PH: Louis' Pool. Yeah, he was a big man, big man, he used to, I remember I almost caused him a fine because when I started playing pool I used to go in there, and you know you always try to get free shots. When people finish with their games; it was 35 cents a half hour, then.

MN: Then? That's a lot of money!

PH: Well I'm telling you, it was for 35 cents, so you always, if you got good at it and had to play for time. You know, I'll play you a game for the time. Loser pays, and that's the way it was, not counting if you wanted to make some money, if you were good enough to play some nine ball or whatever. So I used to go there a lot and kind of like, "I'll get the ball for you!" Because you had to bring them back to the counter, but when people were finished sometimes they just walked away, they just paid their bill and there's balls on the table, so you just grabbed a stick and I used to grab a stick and just start and you know, "Come on with the balls up here! Come on with the balls up here!" and I said, "Alright, just let me take a shot." You know and then I'd fool around taking free shots. And I did a lot and sometimes you wracked, when there was two better players playing each other you made money doing that too. You had to get what we call a gap buck, its an expression, like a tip, that's what it is. So you told them, "Alright where's my gap buck? You know, I did the racking, and the winner gotta give me something, and that's the way it is." Some things were always taken for granted. No one really, especially if you knew each other, it could have been an older guy. It was taken for granted, you know. You always took care of your own. This meaning, your flesh and blood, but also your street family. They were street family. They're always watching out for you when you're walking down the street with your sister. Whether you knew it or not. Cause I've had black friends that were older than me, you know, we've gambled with each other, you know, I would deal for them. I used to deal blackjack and things like that for, I'd be the, I was lucky you know at times you know, when I was a kid. You know I could go out there

and cash some bottles, and before the day was out I'd have me a \$150-\$200 at a young age.

MN: Really?

PH: Yes, and I would be able to buy me some clothes and stuff. See my father, you know, he did the best he could. He maintained us in terms of having food, we always had food. We didn't eat steak, but we always had food. He ate steak, I remember [Laughter] I remember coming home and, well and he deserves it. He was you know busting his hump for this money; 7 days a week, 18-17 hours days, and my mother would make him, like I'd always know when he came home from school you could smell the onions in the pan [Laughter] and the first, I'm serious, you'd take a sliced bread, and you'd pay for it later. Now I know why some of us got you know ulcers and things; because it was spicy. And let's just say the leftover pieces of onion and the juices from the steak with the seasoning she put in for him was in there, and you just took bread and swapped it up and ate it.

MN: Now were you a slick dresser by the time you were 13-14?

PH: Yeah, well, I guess you could say that. Yeah I kind of leaned towards lets just say the hustlers, the way they dressed and the way, it just naturally happened because I was always around those kinds of people. I used to go from pool room to pool room when I finally became a little better pool player. Let's just say, I wasn't a world beater, but I was a lot better than the average guy walking around the block now and people would put the money up and I would do the playing you know at that time. And those types of people dressed a certain way; they wore wing tips, ball tips, ok?

MN: Where'd you get those shoes?

PH: And then you also had your nails. You always put, we used to put the clear. You let your nails grow a little -- You see the hustlers did this.

MN: Ok, they let their nails grow –

PH: A little longer, yeah you know, that's right, I'm telling you it was the thing back in the 50's if you was a hustler. You know some guys had pinky rings, well I didn't have that.

MN: Now what kind, where'd you get the –

PH: You looked good playing –

MN: Ok, now where'd you go get the shoes? Which stores?

PH: Oh, Floor Shine was a biggie.

MN: Where was the nearest Floor Shine?

PH: On Wilkins Avenue. Down there –

MN: There was a Floor Shine?

PH: When my father bought us shoes he would take us to like the neighborhood army and navy store you know that's where you went, and he a kid, and when he get your haircut, you got a crew cut. When he bought shoes, we called it Brogans, you know, I hated them.

MN: Thick shoes?

PH: Thick, yeah, because see he's thinking money, which I mean, I can understand later you know, but it ain't style you know, and your friends, "Man, where'd you get them Brogans from?" [Laughter] you know because they were ugly shoes, but they were thick soles to last long, and that's the point for the parent, ok? And the short haircuts, the so called crew cuts that they called it, which is back in style these days, but I hated it.

MN: So you wanted to have the long slick hair?

PH: Well, I, the pompadour they called it, yeah, that was only when I got the haircut, but when I didn't, as my hair grew back I went back to my own, you know the pompadour style. If you look in that picture you'll see, the picture of, you know, that I showed you of me on stage with the suit. My father bought that suit for me because I was going on stage. Well if you look at here, let me see, the pompadour, yeah!

MN: Yeah, that's the pompadour there.

PH: Yeah! You have to, I didn't have, I always had straight hair, I didn't have curly hair or nothing, to this day you know, so my hair was always straight. So if I didn't put stuff in my hair to hold it in the way that I styled it, it flopped, you know, it just flopped down.

MN: So a lot of your money you spent on clothes?

PH: Well, clothes, shoes, you know to go to the movies, things like that, but I always had to keep a certain amount of money in my pocket because I have to start all over again you know, and things like that. There were times I gave, my mother used to say – oh yeah, there was this basement place on Jennings Street. I used to be the dealer and, again it was blackjack, but at the same time there could be a crap game going on at the same time you know. I might have been at either one of those places; it was Joe's Basement.

BP: Yeah, I just wanted to ask a quick question. Did you ever use that money to spend on your friends also or no?

PH: No, well we had a motto. Let me put it this way, where you were known to be a hustler from the streets ok, no matter how your hustle was, you were a hustler, whatever you did. I mean you had to stick up guys, kind of kind of people, burglars or whatever. Then you had the gambling hustlers, you know the slick talking kind of hustlers. I kind of leaned in that way cause I didn't think I had the guts to stick up nobody.

MN: Now the stick up guys, did they operate out of the neighborhood?

PH: Well when I say we had, there was, every neighborhood has their share of a stick up kind of guy; that he would do a stick up. Let me just put it that way; there were always the few guys that that's all they knew how to do. In other words, they weren't good at –

MN: Now would they tend to get killed or go to jail eventually?

PH: Well, some of them did, and some of them in a way grew out of it. Some of them went from being that to lets say they started working for the number man, they didn't have to do stick ups you know, that sort of thing. But they had that kind of you know, I know being this is being televised I won't use certain words, but guts we'll just say. They would do something like that if they had to, but they never compared to todays; back then they didn't kill you, they just took your money. You know, those types of guys, they didn't kill nobody.

MN: Now in your time on Jennings Street, was anybody ever murdered on the block?

PH: Well there was a couple of people. Sometimes it was a cop who killed one time we heard, it was rumored. Some cop threw somebody off the roof you know. There was, yeah occasionally, but not very often I'll be honest with you, there was an occasional body found, but I don't remember too many times.

MN: Right, now what about gangs? Were there gangs in the neighborhood?

PH: There was gangs in a lot of the neighborhoods, further down from where we lived. You know one time a gang came around looking for my brother. See he was in gangs.

MN: So he was the guy like you said, to fight?

PH: Yeah, he was fighting, and he, I used to sit with, I don't know if he's crazy or he's just got too much heart you know. The term heart is like –

MN: Yeah, it's a big thing.

PH: Yeah. Got a lot of heart, and they don't mean –

BP: Can you tell a little bit about what that means?

PH: When you say, "Oh this guy got a lot of heart," you're talking about guts, guts, that's what you're talking about.

MN: He'll take on 10 people.

PH: To use a term, "He got balls!" ok? You can cut that if you want, but that's what they're saying. Yes he would, and for the dumbest things. I'm telling you. My brother would, he was in a gang called The Crowns, Seven Crowns.

MN: They're pretty well known.

PH: Yeah, that was back then. There was Bohemian Crowns; there was a Seven Crowns, were seven guys who started the gang and they lived on Dawson Street and Prospect, and that's –

MN: That's way further down right?

PH: Yeah, further down Prospect where the train station is. Now, but beyond that is Dawson, you know, you go under the hill then there's Longwood Avenue –

MN: Yeah, they call it Hunts Point that neighborhood.

PH: No, Hunts Point was the Simpson Street area. No, that wasn't Hunts Point. Hunts Point was Southern Boulevard, ok? What I'm talking, Prospect, from Prospect and Jennings Street you had to go down Prospect. Prospect was a long avenue, it stretched all the way to Crotona Park, but going in the other direction, it went beyond down – Longwood, Dawson, and that's where The Crowns were born, Seven Crowns. There were seven guys who started the gang and it became, it mushroomed like a lot of gangs did,

and then it became like cells lets call it, today's word, the Bohemian Crowns. The Seven Crowns were the main ones to start it, and then there was The Bohemian Crowns, that's the one my brother was in, and he was the only white kid in the gang. So we were easily identified to other people you know, so called foes if you will with gangs. And I was in a gang called The Noble Kings, and we also had like the Noble Kings and Queens cause there were girls in the gang too, but we were really a sociable gang. We didn't go to gang fights, only once we was going to have a gang fight with a Spanish gang. It never took place, but we were getting ready for a war, and we put furniture on the roof that we were going to drop off on them. I mean, it was going that far, but we didn't – back then they had what they called "zip guns." You made guns you know. You could make a gun, I made one once, I don't know why I did, I would have never shot nobody, but I did it because it was the thing. Years back, you know, with wood, I won't tell how to make it because I don't want to – but anyways, if you made it you could make it, they call them zip guns, and it shot 22's. One at a time though, you had to always keep reloading it you know. But the, the gang, if you want to call it a gang, it was really a social club you know we gave –

MN: Did you get jackets?

PH: No, but what we did do – there were gangs that did have back then, but we weren't that kind of gang. We were sort of the neighborhood gang but not from putting out fear. We gave like dances, when I say dances, house parties were a big thing. They used to call them "the grind 'em ups"

MN: Right, "the grind 'em ups," the red light, blue light –

Interviewee: Paul Himmelstein
Interviewer: Dr. Mark Naison and Dr. Brian Purnell
Date: November 11, 2005

PH: Yes! Grind ‘em ups. And you used to, from 99, when you, they also had dances at 99, the Community Center. Like you, lets just say the talent show was on, but after the talent show in the basement was the lunch room, that’s where they had dances. And they had, they didn’t call them DJ’s then, but they had a record player with speakers, and you went to the dance downstairs you know. Like I said, me and my brother, mostly me and my brother Larry because we kind of hung around with the same kind of people, but he didn’t hang out with certain people that I did because he didn’t hustle like I did you know. He just didn’t, he didn’t have those kinds of talents, ok? But he was the kind of like I said, he would go, he was in gang fights, one time he came home really messed up, but that was his big mouth that got him to be beat half to death you know. Because him and some of his friends beat up some guy’s uncle stupidly because they were drunk you know. And it turns out, of all the places to be, he was at a house party, one of the “grind ‘em ups.” The person giving the party was the nephew of the guy that got beat up, and they were talking out loud in the party, and you know, a basement party with the low lights, the red lights and all that. He said, and they knew each other, but my brother and his friends didn’t know who the person was that they beat up, ok? It only happened that at the dance, house party dance, we’re not talking halls here, and he overheard about Prospect Avenue. “You did that? Do you know who you beat up? That was my uncle!” And they took him in the backyard, it was his party, you pay to get in, used to be 35 cents, or 50 cents with a card, a business card type, you know they had made them up themselves. If you had the card you only paid 50 cents with the card. You could still come without the card, but it would cost you like 65 cents to get in you know. Occasionally they sold, some places sold hot dogs, but this was after 99.

MN: Right, now, were you and your brother most of your girlfriends were black in that situation?

PH: Oh yeah. There's white girls here. After a year, not only that, you know, I don't know, you know when you're growing up, at least when I was growing up, it's a good thing I grew up and got to meet white people. [Laughter] I'm serious, I'll tell you why, I had a black girl, from the neighborhood, deliberately send out word, "Get, find Paul, and bring him to my house!" And so she was like, "Oh, oh Marilyn's looking for you." I said, "What for?" You know cause I was running the streets. "I don't know she's having some kind of little party that she wants to introduce you to somebody." So I never dreamed, and I, later in life I thought about it and I understood it better you know. But back then I kind of frowned on it. But anyway, I went to her house, and she was, I could hear the music playing, you know, records and stuff, and I went there and there was these two white girls there, you know and some black people, that for some reason, I didn't even, they were friends you know, with her, and she deliberately wanted to introduce me to white girls. Now it had nothing to do with racism, like be with your own kind thing, but in her own way she felt, they need to know white people you know. I can only think that, she didn't say it, but I believe that was her intention. To introduce us to white girls period because this is during the time that it looked like we were never leaving the neighborhood, you know we were growing up there you know and maybe might not leave till I'm a grown man, you know what I'm saying. But it as ok with me, you know, you can't miss what you didn't have, that's number one, around, and like I said, the flashbacks that I'd tell you about earlier is, they weren't my friends, they were my sisters friends, and so that just told me there were white people here. And I was kind of turned off by it because the girl was

drunk, I never forgot that. If you wanted me to meet white people, that was the worst thing she did then because they were partying already and then they sent out to have some guys come up and I was one of the guys she wanted, and to match me up with a white girl; and this girl, she threw up and things like that. So, it was that kind of, she was that drunk, and I really didn't want to be wrong, and I saw the set up. It was a set up, that's how I looked at it.

MN: Now, when did drugs hit Jennings Street? Was it –

PH: Oh there was always drugs around you know, not rampant, but even before my time now.

MN: Like are you talking about like Heroin or about –

PH: Heroin was the big thing.

MN: And even in the 40's?

PH: Yes, Heroin in part was the big thing, ok? That was the big thing back in them days. I had never even heard of coke when I was a little kid, and I'm sure it was around, you know.

MN: But did you see when you were 8-9 years old, were there guys nodding out occasionally?

PH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but they were the neighborhood guys, you knew who they was, you didn't worry about. That was their -- that's what they did, but you ignored it.

MN: And it didn't like, undermine the neighborhood? Really it wasn't that big a deal?

PH: You knew them. You knew them personally, even when they were sober, you know. It's not like you didn't know what they did, but it didn't affect your life, to be honest with you. It didn't affect my life. It didn't mean I'm going to do it.

MN: They didn't rob apartments and stuff?

PH: Well they probably did, but they never robbed my house, I know that. They never robbed a lot of peoples houses because they would have gotten their butt whipped, it was known. No they, and occasionally those were the speaking when you asked about people who died, well some of them O.D.ed and died. Sometimes they got killed trying to do something you know to get money, but there weren't, it wasn't, I didn't see a massive of people like that. There was, you know, you knew who was and who wasn't. Most people there was, there was local, a few alcoholics you know, but again, it wasn't in the multiples.

MN: So you never felt like that this was a place that was unsafe?

PH: Not for my family it wasn't, it might have been maybe to someone else who wasn't from the neighborhood. No because even those people that we're talking about would come to your aid. They know you all their whole life.

MN: So you could not come from another block onto Jennings Street?

PH: Well, there was a time, and I was real young then, cause my brother, my older brother, who's still alive now, it's just me and him left out of 8 boys.

MN: Really?

PH: Yeah, there was 14 of us I told you.

MN: Yeah, and only 2 of you are –

PH: It's just me and him and 3 sisters left, and this all happened in the last 5 years. I lost a lot of family members. Two at a time, like sickness; weeks, like weeks apart, things like that. Anyway, but my brother, there was a time, down the block couldn't go up the block. Up the block couldn't come down the block on Jennings Street, and we're talking one

block. Not all the way down to you know, and then there was further down Jennings Street was the Spanish area. Even though the markets stayed Jewish for years, even when I was out there street hustling, there was a Wilkins Avenue Market you know, and the people who ran the market, you know like the deli, it was Jewish this, Jewish that, the food stands and all that stuff. The pickle place; there was always a famous guy at the barrel. You know you bought those pickles, you picked the one you wanted out of the barrel, big barrel with seeds floating around.

MN: Yeah I know, I grew up –

PH: Yeah, ok, so the thing is there was a time, the early years, obviously the early years when I'm talking about cause I, you know the war stories I heard from my brother and then you know I got to notice myself. Because by the time I could leave, I could go anywhere I wanted to, and I did go where ever, anywhere, even in the neighborhoods that I didn't live. But you could tell I belonged, just like my other brothers. You could tell we didn't walk like this, we walked down there like, "This is my block." And you never was challenged technically, you were never challenged like, "What are you doing here?" Now there was people who occasionally they looked, but we knew people everywhere, my family you know, they knew us, the Himmelstein family. You know, there's 14 of us, how can you not know somebody in the family? You know, 6 girls and 8 boys. But basically, for the boys in the family, cause like I said, my sisters had, the older ones had their friends from when they grew up which were white friends, but they also had black friends because they were just young girls at that time. So, and they stayed knowing the white friends even into marriage years, where by that time, I was the age where they were when they had white friends, it was totally black, like I said you know, and I didn't have

any white friends, I didn't know white people. [Crosstalk] I didn't feel comfortable around then neither.

MN: When you were hustling, did you have any mentors, older you know guys who took you under their wings?

PH: Well, like I said, I don't know why, but I always learned fast certain kinds of things. Scholastically inclined, no, but in the street. I was just better at some things, I picked it up, I picked up fast on some things you know as a kid to where I was asked by older guys, by men, "You cut the game," you know, "I want you to cut the game." The game was C-Low, its another game, you know. It's like blackjack with dice. You play in the same kind of ways, a little bit like blackjack; anyway, the point is, you become like let's just say, maybe you don't make the same money as the older guys who have been around longer than you, but you're accepted on an equal level believe it or not. They don't look at it like little boy get out of here kind of thing. I wore my hat cocked to the side just like they did.

MN: Aces, deuces –

PH: Yeah. I just you know, I talked, I could out talk a lot of them.

MN: Now, did you ever, you know, you started talking, now they call it talking smack pretty early?

PH: Well, you know I call it sidewalk talk, that's what I call it, you know along the sidewalk, you know you just say things, and me, I could always have something to say. I always had something, If you said something I always had something to come back with, with you, you know. They're just saying you have you know, its hard to – you have to be in a predicament [Crosstalk]

MN: Do you have any of the sayings that you remember?

PH: You know, like, “You back off or you fall off.”

MN: You said, “You back off or you fall off”?

PH: Yeah, that’s you know, guys would say things like that or you know, you’re asking me to say things, I need scenarios to happen you know at the time, ok? This is like an instantaneous thing you do. And I don’t mean it all sometimes we just talked a lot of crap. What they call rap today was called crap then. Like you might see something like, you know someone is getting in your face or something, and he’s trying to be a wise guy or something, you know if you, I made my own stuff up a lot of times because I just could you know. I can’t explain it to you unless something happens to make me say it. For instance, I say things about, someone asks me about my job, I’ll give you an answer you know, what do you do for instance. You know, and I made up a poem about what I do. You know, well I said, what do I do, I’m glad you asked, you know. I add sheen where its lean, gloss where its lost, but that’s not where I stop, you see I even swing a mop, and just when you thought that was enough, I grab a rag and have to dust, but before I’m through I grab a machine and end with a buff, what do I do? I spoil soil and I make old look like new, and they call me doorman too. [Laughter] Ok? This is just, I just do, I can do things like that [Laughter] so that’s original, and that’s one thing, and other things, just to let you know, there’s another fan. See I always, that’s why I used to talk for people in the streets I’m talking about. “Go ahead, you know what to do...” For instance, I have a saying, “He who has said it first has said it unrehearsed, all others are second, second at best.” You understand? So if you listened to what I just said, its original, you know, and that’s original. And you can use things, I just say things, I just, people look at me sometimes like a nut you know, white people mostly, and sometimes black people. Cause sometimes

I used to just play with people. I used to just do it because I could do it, and all my life I've been that kind of kid. I have this way of talking to people, you know rapping to them like, and it could be business really, but I'll entertain them and still let them know what they need to know, ok? And that's how I am, that's just, its in me. Now, I've heard, I once heard, I'll give you an example of which way it really made me angry though. Like I once heard, and I'm going to mention his name because he did it to me on a radio, a public radio station. Percy Sutton was running the Apollo for a period of years I remember, one day I'm in my apartment and I hear my song being played, one of the songs being played. I said, "Oh look at this, I haven't heard that in years. Someone's playing my record." Now it was a jazz station, you know, I think it was 88.3 at the time, yeah. So I was doing something in the house and I had the radio on and I hear me singing, and now, I'm saying, "Oh, look at that, I haven't heard me on the radio in years!" So then I hear after the song is over, that was the one at the Apollo that you heard, last week's when is and blah blah blah. I hear Percy Sutton say, "Now you see that man there, he was a white man, that white boy got rich, he became a millionaire stealing from the black!" I said, "What?!" I was feeling good that someone was playing my record you know cause I didn't think nobody knew about me.

[CONVERSATION ENDS ABRUPTLY]

[END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO; BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE]

PH: He went four times in a row on a Wednesday and then you get to appear like I said - part of the prize then was, you win twenty-five dollars and that's to split, four guys, to split.

MN: Yes.

PH: Every Wednesday you get twenty-five dollars if you won, then you get to come back and you can only go four times and after your fourth win consecutively, you get to appear for a week with the big guys.

MN: Right.

PH: The professionals and that in turn makes you a professional from that point on and that's what happened, and then I appeared, that picture you see with Dizzy Gillespie.

MN: Right.

PH: That I showed you.

MN: Yes.

PH: That's us at the Apollo.

MN: Right.

PH: I'm pretty sure that is, and I appeared, we all appeared, the group appeared at the Apollo. Now he played the amateur, one of those amateur nights, and I asked him - -I call the station because I thought it was happening at the time that I was listening and it was - -they were based in Jersey

MN: Yes, WGPR, yes.

PH: Yes, so I said listen, I spoke to whoever was on at the time. I said I was listening to your show just now and I heard me singing, I said I'm that guy Paul Himmelstein, I don't like what this guy is saying, I was angry a little bit cause I was feeling good they are playing my record, which, I didn't - -I just didn't think people knew about it, cause we have didn't become like the Cadillac's and - -I got stopped quick in my career and only because of collectors - - because of people who are collectors and that guy Rock and Rare, I showed you his picture, he brought it to my attention, "Oh no, people know you,"

I said no, we didn't get that far. I think I was about seventeen when it was over for me and, because I never worked again and I never pushed it, because I didn't know how to push myself in that way back then. I only knew the street. I didn't try to make me a performer.

MN: Now did any teacher ever try to grab you by the coattails and say I see what you're doing, you're smart you can do it another way, did that ever happen to you?

PH: No actually, no. But the teacher well they knew I could sing because - -I forget how they knew but it became known that I could sing throughout the neighborhood.

MN: Well, how about academically?

PH: It kind of made me a star of the block. Academically, one teacher I remember in the early - -when I was a kid, elementary school, would take time out to come up at lunch hour and read, to learn to read better; she took me under her wing. I remember she was a sergeant, she used to tell us -just to keep us in line." I was in the army and I was sergeant" and she wasn't going to take no stuff off of us.

MN: Right.

PH: So she wanted us to know that, but she took me under her wing and privately taught me for a while when I was in her class, I was like a slow learner scholastically, it turned out that I had a disability, I was born with it and didn't know it, that kind of stuff - - the retaining thing - - you learn it- -I know it now - - that's why I'm telling you I'm bad with names - - well I'm bad with things like that, like directions I really suck at things like that. I got a car and all that but when I go - - my family knows me for that. No it's easy for everybody else who knows how to get there it's simple, man just get on there and go about a quarter - - well how do I know I went a quarter of a mile I can't be watching that

dial and driving - - that's how my mind works, and my way of doing things is, when I have family functions even listen I know how to get to your house I'm leaving my car at your - - by your house, and I'm going with you. Don't tell me to follow you because it's always that - - if anything can go wrong, Murphy's law, here comes somebody in between us and there is a split in the road and if I didn't see your car I don't know which way you went and I got the kind of luck that I went the opposite way and they're going this way you know what I mean, so it's kind of like that and you can explain to me how to get some place - -that's why I could never be a taxi driver. The bottom line is - - before you're finished telling me how to get there - -go three blocks this way then go there - -I already forgot the first part. It's just the way it is and that's what I learned - -I went to a place for eight hours at a hospital, I wanted to know how come I forget things and I was young so it's not Alzheimer's and that's just it but what I don't do is forget faces and places. Now I'm going to give you an example that's funny, a teacher did that. When I was in school elementary school, one of our homework things was - on the way to school - - she is going to check you on this - - look at things in the window and stuff like that as you're passing and we are going to have a discussion on that. What did you see that you can remember? Well, for some reason I'm one of those kind of people if I met you in my life and I saw your face and stuff like that I may not remember your name or where it was but I know I know you.

MN: Yes.

PH: And that's it, and there's no getting around it and you may remember, yes, I'm so and so - - the South Bronx reunion I go every year , there is always someone approaching , which one are you Paul or Larry or Sid - - how is your brother Red and all that kind of

stuff and I'm looking at the person I know he knows me he's mentioning my families' names. I would have to talk with respect, "What family are you from?" "And one time this guy Levi Scott, was his name and this was his younger brother, which when I grew up I knew Levi, everybody always got their own little private cliques, even when you are in the same neighborhood.

MN: Yes.

PH: You know each other, you speak, but you're going with your friends, and he said, "the Scott family, you remember the name Levi Scott?" This is at the reunion I said "Yes oh yes Levi - -but I knew that wasn't Levi" He said, "I'm the younger brother. When we were growing up I was too young for you to know at the time - - I would have been a kid too " I said, "How old are you first of all" and he was like in his middle fifties and I'm here in my sixties so I said, "You would have been just a little kid I ignored ." So there's things like that- -I said I recognize your face but I can't place where - -what neighborhood. Was it from my neighborhood school? And he had to refresh my memory and you run into people and - -I found also that I'm not the only one with that type thing you know you remember people but can't remember their name until they start talking about things.

MN: Now how old were you when you moved out of Morrisania?

PH: Well I think - - we did not even move you see that's another thing - - we were put out. My father fell on hard times [laughter] he used to use periodically- -I tell you he made sure we ate and if it was a choice between food and the rent and the rent is due.

MN: Yes

PH: Back then the landlords wanted it on the first the whole time I don't know if they had a law that you had up until the tenth there's laws out there that - - yes they want it on the first but you really do have until the tenth to pay it if you - - pay days don't always fall on the first - -

MN: Right

PH: Bottom line is - - we were - - this is how my family broke up, and when I say broke up I mean it was a bad time for my mother I always felt bad for - - that's where my street - -you see that was why it was good for me to grow up the way I did for survival purposes - - see my brother Larry he was - -he would have to steal to - but he was gutsy that way if he had to if he had to survive because that's the way he would do it because he could not do those things that I could do well enough to make money off it. Let's put it like that, he could be a bodyguard kind of guy.

MN: Yes.

PH: Because he was tough enough that way and he didn't give a damn - - talk about ten guys or whatever like you said and - - so we got put out - - one time the story my father used to use, and it worked for years when he was falling behind he always paid the rent -- my father didn't drink or anything like that, the only thing he did was smoke Camels I didn't even know he stopped smoking until I asked my mother for a cigarettes for my father's, and she said "your father doesn't smoke, and I said what are talking about he smokes Camels all my life. I saw him smoking Camels. She said, "Your father stopped smoking five years ago." And I didn't even know that. He came and went. You didn't sit down in my house- - we had great Thanksgiving time with all of us and he would bring

home the turkey home alive and let it hang out in the house running around he used to do things like that because he worked in the chicken business.

MN: Holy s***!

PH: Yes my father would bring home a rabbit or something, he would bring a turkey and let it run free in the house and later on for the day, he would things like that and we had - -you think the president had a big turkey, the president of the United States they always had the 25 pound turkeys and stuff, well so did we, but I suspect that he got it either for nothing or almost nothing because he worked in that line of work. But we eventually, his story used to be, "Judge, listen I work seven days" - - which was true, "your honor I work seven days a week , I got two jobs and I got fourteen kids to feed , to clothe and I cannot always give the rent on the first." He did pay it within the month but sometimes it had to be the 20th or something like that. Well he got away with that for a good number of years, when this landlord, - -now it was a black landlord, it became a black landlord who bought the building, I guess, over the years I didn't pay attention to it all I knew- -I never forgot his name Ulin, was his name Mr. Ulin. And he had put the people out under our apartment, same kind of an apartment six room apartment so he could move in. But he wanted our apartment for years, for his family and the good way to get it was like, this man doesn't pay his rent on time, simple as that. And my father always won, they favored him because he had fourteen kids and - - this one time though, by this time I was seventeen. Yes, I was seventeen I think, and it didn't work with this judge. He always got the benefit of the doubt and they used to tell - - "Listen the man is working, he's not a bum or anything, he's doing the best he can, you could wait " And he did catch up with his rent and stuff for years, but there were those times I just didn't know about when I

was younger, but I'm sure there were times while I was a little kid, he had that problem because when I was little, the older ones were living at home too because they weren't that old.

MN: When you got put out where did you go?

PH: All the furniture on the street and my mother was crying - - I really felt bad for her, it was a bad time and the neighbors cried I found out later - - my mother used to go, like I said we had the neighbors - - when I came home from school or something - - "where is your mother?" - - sometimes she wasn't home but she wasn't far from home, and you knew we had to go and we knocked on the door in the building - - this lady named Midgie, this family down there - - they lived on the ground floor - - "Is my mother here?" Yes your mother is here and she is in the living room with Midgie and they're talking and stuff- - and they played numbers and they would - - "What you like Mrs. Himmelstein for the lead and back and forth - - what you think is going to lead the number today?" And you played for six cents back then they took - - my mother was considered lucky but she had a list like that but it was like three cents for a number - - for a dollar you got six hundred dollars of course you didn't play that kind of money back in them days. She would have a list so her whole list she would have a ton of numbers and she played everything how could you not win? So she hit for fifteen cents sometimes but back then it was worth thirty dollars and it stayed that way for pretty much all years even until today. A nickel if you got it straight, a straight number, the way you played it you got thirty dollars for that nickel, ok. So she had, she used play so many numbers maybe a big load, but it was a six cents combo so that meant in any other way combination you still won; you didn't hit it straight so you'd get some money which was less but that might be

fifteen dollars, fifteen dollars she could do shopping with and she did things like that. My father played numbers too but he didn't play regularly, he kept a particular number because that is how we got our TV, so this was the kind of neighborhood, everybody played numbers everybody did. The candy store man took numbers and I didn't know it until he asked me to do him a favor and take a bag to his building which was a few blocks away and in a sense it became a job. "Call your brother," he would tell one of my brothers or sisters. Ask your brother Paul to come here, tell him I want him to do me a favor. And he said, "Listen, bring this to my building and put this behind the steps." And I didn't know what I was taking and I never forgot that. One day I got curious and I looked inside and I saw all these slips, that's how I knew, oh this guy takes numbers; it was a legitimate candy store but he also hustled. It was a hustling kind of a neighborhood.

MN: Yes.

PH: There were people that worked legitimate jobs, but they also hustled on their off time and that's the way it was. You just did that to make extra money and if you were good at something like playing pool or just good at playing cards or whatever it is well that was your thing and you could do better than a lot of guys, other guys. Sometimes there were gambling parties in someone's house, "Oh, I'm having a poker game," and they spread the word, or a blackjack game down in the basement. I remember my mother coming down there and I was a little kid like thirteen, fourteen she be coming down there at one in morning, two, cause she would come down cause she heard that's where it was, and I'd be dealing I always was dealing for somebody and that's how made money, in between playing as well.

MN: Yes.

PH: And cutting the games. Anyway the bottom line is, I would go to the door in the basement I'd go, "Yes, ma." She said, "Your father is going to be home soon," because he would be driving cabs on his off days from the other job and she said, "You got to come home soon," and I would deliberately count money in front of her [laughing] she said "You can't - it's late you got to get home," and I said I will be there in a little while, matter of fact she was like an out so I couldn't lose some of this money. I said, "Take this with you," and I might give her like a hundred or a hundred and a quarter and keep about forty or fifty that I had with me because I'm not finished really, and I used to climb [laughing] we had a ledge and I was one flight up on Prospect - - Prospect Avenue there is a ledge outside and I'd go through the hallway glass window, open up and climb across a long ledge and that led to our bedroom. The boy's bedroom, we all - -there were times - - the early years we slept together, it was like a barrack big beds. When you were a little kid you could put two or three kids in and it was like this way that way.

MN: Right.

PH: So like I said - - it was big thing when we got bunk beds - -he must have hit the number we talked among ourselves

MN: [laughter]

PH: One time we finally got bunk beds years later as we were getting older and that was like - - it was a treat when you got stuff like that, in my house because you got used to - - I'm telling I never thought of us as poor. I remember walking down the street - - a soldier, it's a flap - - it needed to get glued and we - -so until you got it fixed - -that was a sign you need shoes and your friends would make fun of you - - sometimes and I struggled. I made money early.

MN: Now at seventeen you ended up living on your own?

PH: Well I lied then, they had had enough what happened was - - there were still younger, my sister and a brother - -they were too young they were really too young. I was seventeen but they were like ten and stuff, so yes, we got put out, the furniture on the street and I always felt guilty that I should have become a famous singer because I might have gotten them that house. But part of like I said, I liked singing in the group. See I don't know if I made a good decision or a bad decision - -I only knew we all wanted to buy our mother a house in my mind, and I liked what I was doing singing, I felt that the backup made me sound better because I always sang a capella so we do as a group but even before them - - unless I was on a stage where they take you on the side and say what key do you sing in and again I do not know, I'll start - - well start singing and the piano player would say, "Ok, you're in C, I had a high pitched voice, like I said and - - as I got to a teenage age me and Frankie Lymon supposedly sounded alike that's up to interpretation, you heard the record so - -and I was mistaken for him back then, a lot of people didn't know how he looked they just heard his music and a lot of times the neighborhood thought it was us - - but we didn't record then, and they said, "No we heard your record we know you made a record." I said, "That is some kid named Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers." [Laughter] And they said, "Man he sounds just like you, " well that's not us I'm telling you." We used to do a lot of ten dollar gigs and stuff but , like I started to say I lied and said, "Well I got a place, we got a place," and I took my bother Larry cause like I said by this time I was when I say established, an established street money maker. I already could play pool better than a lot of people, I already could cut games and get a percentage of it from the guy whose game it is but I was just better- -I

used to make up - - because I used to entertained those guys - - four trays , a miserable ways, five deuce cut him loose, and all that stuff. I did all that stuff. I said like in C-Lo, "He h'd away he'll have to pay."

MN: [Laughter]

PH: C-Lo is a game like blackjack and when you throw, let's just say a pair of sixes and an ace, one, you lose. It's like craps - ace, deuce. And I was that kind of a guy. I always rattled on and on. I even have to be protected a couple of times. The guy is losing his money he doesn't want jokes about it. - - there is a barbershop were we used to have this game and I said he threw four he needs more and I would go on and on. That's the way I cut games, so guys would say, "My friends, it's a neighborhood thing." Let's just say I'll do a lot of guys when it came to that kind of stuff, I just had it - - it was natural for me that's all.

MN: Right.

PH: And till this day it still is.

MN: Right

PH: Even the people on my job that are not used to that - - sometimes I amaze them. I just - -I forget myself- -I can act accordingly let's just say.

MN: Right it sounds like the first Eminem.

PH: [Laughter.]

MN: if there was rapping then you are about thirty years too soon.

PH: Yes I was. I look at that kid Eminem and all I think I used to do that for free.

MN: [Laughter.]

PH: I did for free and they make money of it now. There wasn't a word that you heard that I couldn't rhyme. I mean I automatically do. My natural conversation was like that - - just a normal conversation , I just instinctively would rhyme the word that was the last one. And I might be telling you something about something or giving some sort of neighborhood advice or something. I would always - -whenever I told somebody something or explained something to someone, I did in a way that was entertaining, It just came natural for me that's all, I just - -it was natural and I could, there was a lot of black people in my neighborhood, let's just use the term slicksters and they could rap. But I went a little further I am not saying I was the best or anything. I don't mean it that way. I got from them obviously, from growing up in the environment.

MN: Yes.

PH: And over hearing, just like I told you my singing for instance, I used to sing things like PS I Love You and in the background I would hear the radio and when I started singing rock 'n roll which was around in the beginning of the fifties, I started - -you start out singing other peoples' songs because other groups were out already and - -then you kind of create your own style and then before I knew it. I already had the accent, whether I knew it or not I didn't know, I did not think of myself of having an accent. Somebody - - it was always somebody listening to me saying where are you from, I said, America.

MN: [Laughter.]

PH: Where you think I'm from? You sound like you are from Georgia that kind of stuff. I said no then I knew where they were coming from well I am from the South it's just called the South Bronx.

MN: [Laughter.]

PH: I would just play with. I never really took anything to heart. I was never insulted. I couldn't care less what you thought because I do not sound white enough for you. It really didn't bother me. I didn't hang out with white guys so who cared anyhow and I didn't hate white people, don't get me wrong, I just didn't know any. And when I did get to know some I mean I met a couple that they heard about me through some black friends, who come from my neighborhood who knew white people ok, because they stretched out a little bit. They belonged to clubs that had white people in it they were - - let's call it the token black in their gang where we would be the token white, but we weren't thought of that way and we didn't think that way like I said nobody was - -nobody talked - - I'm not talking to a black person I'm talking to Robert or Tony, that's the way it was, ok and like I said even though the N word was used with affection when I was spoken to by my neighborhood friends I wouldn't reply in kind. I just don't like it - -I didn't like because it was never meant to be a compliment, ok, and I just can't and I could have easily. I see white people doing it now with their black friends and it's like natural. I've seen this - -I see young teenagers, Spanish guys, young, - - and they do that and I look at that and I think about - -and it's acceptable among friends because you're not really doing that cotton picking stuff, it's not done with that mentality, ok ,with each other. These are your friends you hang out with, and the term would be used in the same my friends used it to me even though I didn't reply in kind. I just never liked it because that wasn't, the white people didn't make that word up to compliment you; it was to degrade you, that was simple as that. I'm talking about the South of course, I didn't even know - -I was one of those kids - -I didn't even know black people sat at the back of the bus by law and when I heard about it - -I didn't in all my life growing up there no one ever talked about that - -I

don't think a lot of black people knew from the neighborhood then either it's only when you get older and - -I saw like movies - -I used to see when you went to the weekend movies it was natural, like, Step 'n Fetchit, I didn't look at him in a negative way, it was funny it was funny, but it was meant to - -I think in some ways to make black people look, all of them are like him, like this guy or that guy what they show the Aunt Jemima thing.

MN: Right.

PH: I didn't think of it in a special way it - - what I saw that's all it was at the time and that didn't mean the masses that's how they are. I knew better because I was growing up with them. Race was never a problem when I was growing up, my race, their race, other races. It only became a problem I will be honest with you when I started meeting white people and - - they naturally because of the way they grew up would use terms that I didn't like and I didn't want to be associated - -even the guys I thought I could hang out with if they said something that was negative in that way, I would have to say hold up Jack don't never say nothing like that with me with you, because the people you're saying that to see us together and to another person who doesn't know me who is not white sees me as whether I said it or not we are together and you are using the N word but you are using it negatively or Spic, those words that always been around. I didn't care, I let them know - - stop the car, I've had that happen when I had to tell him open this damn door Jack - - what's the matter? What's the matter; you yelled out this that and the other. I'm in car with you, I look like you now, to that person only I didn't say it but that do not mean - -I must think like you and I can't allow that, I'll walk and my friend apologized to me - - the Italian dude. He knew where I came from I'm just not going tolerate that like I said I can

hang out with - - then he tries to explain himself to me because something about his girlfriend that some guys were bothering them - - he wanted to agitate them at the time - - yes but I do not care, this isn't about your girlfriend - - I'm not with you here because somebody was bothering your girlfriend. Do not make it a race thing

MN: Yes

PH: Ok, because someone hit on your girlfriend who wasn't white ok. You are turning it to a race thing and I'm not down with that. Don't ever do that again in front of me. Once they got to know where I'm at - - they would apologize when they even slipped. They look over at me and I would look at them. In conversation if they would use terms.

MN: Right.

PH: And certain guys that I could hang out with - -that I felt I could hang out with - -they would use those terms and at times in their conversation and I would have to let them know you can't do that with me Mr. Jack goodbye - -I would walk away. Oh man I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I apologize. I didn't mean nothing like that I was just telling a story. I said yes I told you man - - my family is that way. You want to see the UN meet my nieces and nephews that's how we married ok. Like I said, my first encounter is to be proper for the audience.

BP: Man you can say it how you say it.

PH: No what I'm saying I was with a black girl, and my next one, and my next one.

Actually the woman I married was a white girl that I met among these people, the white people after I got to know certain white dudes that I could hang around with and they - - some of them also were hustlers, in the same way that I hustled, but now I'm older. There were some people I felt they were cool. - -I always used a term for white guys.

MN: [Laughter]

PH: I'm serious that's how I had to term them - - they were alright for white guys. It didn't mean they didn't use those words when they felt like it at times, but they would respect me though and would do it in front of me if it came to their mind oh man I'm sorry I forgot you were here - -I know you do not like that - -I took that as respect. I kind of felt like the black guy with them - -don't get me wrong I knew who I was as a person and I'm not ashamed of being white or - - the truth is I'm pink and I always tell everybody see there is other stories like - -I make up things I told you - - now we're talking I could tell you things that can pop in my mind. - - Again, he who has said it first has said it unrehearsed and this is what makes originality, ok, and things like, I tell stories about my life like I'm kind of telling you now but I joke around sometimes my sister always makes me tell the story cause it's kind of like the story I told you before but I'm the only real, confessed colored person and I could prove it and if you have the time you can listen, you have to really listen to what I'm saying because it is really true what I'm going to say, and if took time to really think about your life you would agree. First of all, I was born in a very early age upon arrival I was met by someone covered in blood if that wasn't scary enough. Ok I came into the world I was called white of the Caucasian persuasion when in truth I was pink all over. I also come in a shy red, and a painful black and blue. Now if that's not color then what are you ok - - that's part of the story and the other part is the hard luck part - -I mean I was born like I said at the age of zero, could not walk, couldn't crawl, had a speech impediment goo-goo ga-ga and that's part of the story. I usually give that part first, but I think about things in terms of life and all of this is very true of all of us but I turned it into - - call it a routine if you want, if I was on stage like

those comedians talking about their lives - - this would be one of my probably, things - -I just do things like that. Sometimes I can be creative on a street level I mean I'm no professor or you or, I'm not Joe college like I said I do not try to be something I'm not but I'm not ashamed of who I am either and I do not care if - -I used to - -I don't care if I sound black to some people. Once I got to know white people I was around them a lot it's like I said, all I knew was black and Spanish people and that's all you see every day of your life in school, out of school, on the block. You don't even know it but you are using accent - -you are becoming - -you are getting an accent. The only time you really know you got an accent is when someone unlike you hears you. They're looking at you, where are you from? Because they see a white guy but when they close their eyes they hear a black guy. I have heard this a lot of times, I've been called half a nigger, excuse the language folks, but I have been called that. I have been threatened by cops because of the company I kept when I was growing up. I didn't - - they would be yelling - -not a lot - - but I have had a cop yell out the car I'm going to get you, and I looked over at my friend who was black - -said I wonder what the hell did I do why is he telling me that. I didn't realize till later on it's because of where I am. He saw me as a white guy that probably don't live there but I'm around the black neighborhood well a lot of people tend to - - it never dawns on them, maybe he is born here and growing up here and lives down the block. Never do they think like that. Its why is he here - - he must be here to get drugs or he must be - - that kind of stuff. I'm putting this guy sleep I could see it.

MN: I have been up since five.

PH: I'm all night worker.

MN: You are just starting you are warming, and I'm winding down

PH: I won't keep you long because you are the one who told me to come.

MN: No this is amazing keep going if I fall asleep they will take over.

PH: Anyway but the point is these are things that happened in my life but they were lot of good things there are some negative and a lot of positive I don't want to make it sound like - -yes, I had a rough life, I was poor even after ,as an adult - -young adult. I was homeless before it was in style. They didn't have shelters, because I could have damn sure went to because I remember seeing me walking in blizzards just for five dollars from a friend who was going to give me five dollars and I had to walk from one side of the town past Pelham Pkwy area down by Port Chester all the way to University for five dollars in a blizzard and I was walking like that and luckily this Italian guy I told you about to this day we are friends, because he had a best friend who was black too so he just did what he did to make them mad, because he wanted them to get out so we could bounce on them. But I did not want be associated that way no let me out and I got out and I went back to the so-called candy store on Vies and I went to the corner there and just hung out there - -what happened to you how come you left because you turned it into a race thing. Your girl complained to you that some black guys were saying things to her and they were not racial things, they were just hitting on her, but she was white she did not like the idea of being hit on by black people I guess. And you made it into a race thing and I told you I won't be associated with no crackers and things like that you know where my family is, I already told you. You know some of my family already so I cannot associate with that, and that's the way it was and he understood. Like I said I do not want to repeat the same story but basically so I said - - I'm ok today, I got a co-op I'm ok today, I'm not rich or nothing like Percy Sutton said when he was talking about me on the show -

-I mean I had a place to live and all but, they told me it was old recording of the show when I did call by the way I said I want a rebuttal. I said this man does not even know me --he tries to play like I'm giving the black people a break by taking over the Apollo. Well he took over the Apollo but he didn't do nothing for nobody and number one, it was the black audience that picked me as the winner. One or two white people might have been there and they were related to me - -I don't think they were allowed. Four Wednesdays in a row which was a the amateur night and like I told you back then they showed movies in between shows. Because later on down the line after we won four times, which amounted to a hundred dollars, twenty five each week. It took a few months and we had to get on the Apollo's back, when we are going to do our show we won we are suppose to appear for a week and we got what they call scale back then. It was a hundred and fifty dollars per person though, and that was a lot of money too for that time. And I remember working for a dollar an hour, ok. And I got hundred and fifty dollars for an appearance. I had a lot of fun as a kid they were good times and you're poor and you don't - -even with holes in my shoes things like that. I laugh at it now because I can. I didn't blame nobody, that's just the way life was. Life as you are born into it and where you are is where you are and that is your world ok. And if you did not go no further than you surroundings that is your world.

MN: Yes.

PH: There were black families that had more than us. I used to go to this guy's house just to play with his toys. He had good toys and stuff like that I remember, and he was an only child. This one white girl, I mean this one black girl tried to introduce me and the reason was she felt I should know - -people use the term, my own kind. She probably

thought this guy is never going to meet white people. At the time it really did not make me no difference I did not dislike white people they just were not there. I was not prejudiced against white I am not - - my family is not prejudiced against nobody for what they are - -we do not have those hang ups in my family. When I say the UN I mean the UN. I got Cuban nieces and this is blood relatives Cuban, Dominican, Puerto Rican, Afro, and these are my nieces and nephews they out number us now when back in the day we were the large family and now we are down to this handful. And all my nieces and nephews - - Italian, or Caucasian. The only ones we did not really hook up with I think about it I just laugh - -I said, "I don't think we got any Irish in the family."

MN: [Laughter.]

PH: Then I married a girl who, she recently died but, back when I was married to her, who was part Irish, part Spaniard, part this but if you were to ask the family, well what are you? They would always 'fess up to Irish that is the one they favored, and I remember when we were going to get married the candy store lady in her neighborhood on Tremont Avenue she said, My daughter is getting married to this Jewish guy." She said, "Can't you do something about that?" that was another Irish woman, she said, "There's nothing I can do." We had a hard time getting married by a priest by a rabbi - -they are all alike I do not care what collar you wear I'm telling you that is the way it is unfortunately. I mean you can't get a rabbi to say a prayer for you because Jewish people - -I didn't know about these things. They were against cremation. So were the Catholics ok I found out - - not too long ago either. The Catholic Church changed that, it's ok now. The Jewish church did not change that and when my brother died and I told my nephew - - get - - because he speaks Hebrew had a Bat Mitzvah - - my brothers and I we didn't live that way. I

remember I thought you had to be white to be Jewish I had no - -I just assumed it. Every Jewish person I ever saw was a white person, but little that did I know in the neighborhood of the black people that I was growing up with they were Jewish, some of them. There was one kid I remember his name was Malachi, and he used to stop he lived on Jennings just around the corner of the first building - - and he would yell out, "Himmelstein, are you going to be at the shul?" which was off by Crotona Park, at that time it was a Jewish shul. "Yes, we'll be there later." But the only one that went there was my grandmother - - for a while she lived with us and I would catch her dovening during the night.

MN: Right.

PH: When you're coming out going to the bathroom half asleep three, four in the morning. There's my grandmother. Very holy woman, more holy than I think the rabbis and priests as a matter of fact she stopped talking to me when she found out -

[END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO]

MN: At that time it was a Jewish?

PH: Yeah, yeah, it would be there later, but the other one that went there was my grandmother. For a while she lived with us, and I'd catch her, what they'd call dovening, during the night. When you kind of go in the bathroom you know half asleep, 3-4 in the morning, here's my grandmother, with this, you know, a very holy woman. More holier I think than the rabbis and the priests. As a matter of fact she stopped talking to me when she found out that I was eating a ham sandwich. You know I grew up, don't get me wrong when I say I don't eat pork, that all happened later on in life. I chose not to eat it no more. My friends used to tease me, anyway, some of my black friends who don't eat pork,

they're not Muslims, but they'd say, "Look at this guy." You know, he would tell us, he would rat me out to the deli guy because I'd ask for, "Can I get some milk with –" you know, I didn't know the rules. You know I didn't grow up like that. He said, "Man, you can't, we're in a Kosher Deli." He would take me to dinner or lunch or something, my friend. I said, "Well, why don't we eat butter on bread? I can't eat no dry bread! Stick in the throat bread!" [Chuckles] You know that kind of stuff. He called the waiter over and he said, "Sir, see this guy here, he's Jewish, and he's supposed to know this.

MN: Are we going to run out? Yeah. We're going to have to –

PH: That's cool, I've talked you to death.

MN: It's pretty amazing, you know Brian, some of the people in your class should hear this. Given Brian, yeah, Brian teaches a class where some of the black people think that no white person could be poor.

PH: Oh boy. Let me put it this way, we'd probably be considered by all the white people, poor white trash. You know, the term that you use for poor whites by affluent whites, and I work for affluent whites for 11 years now, but I've had to straighten a few of them out too you know every now and then. You know what it is? You can take them out the neighborhood but you can't take the neighborhood out of them. Oh I guess in some ways I am like that. You took – I'm out of the neighborhood as far as living there goes, I go there because my friends they're like grandparents now and all. And we hang out and congregate with each other. Some of them still play numbers, I do too occasionally. And we stand around in summer time especially and we just rap about the old days and sometimes we'll look at some of the young people doing something that didn't look too good. "Look at that, we didn't do that. Look what he's doing." You know, and we'll talk,

but then I said, and I would bring up things like, “See remember when our parents used to say things like that? Look what we’re saying, and we’re our parent’s age now. And we thought we wouldn’t do things, “Oh, I’ll never talk like that!” You know, but I make fun of the fact of you know I just laugh about life in general. Everybody thinks they know something you know. “Oh I won’t be like my mother or like my father you know, they always saying this, they call this music crazy or – that’s not music and this –“ That’s why I keep an open mind even for today’s music you know rap and stuff like that. I don’t listen to it on a regular basis because sometimes you can’t understand what the hell they’re saying. The annunciation of the words they’re saying is not – either my hearing is bad you know possibly, and I don’t hear it clearly you know because there’s different things that happen to you I’m finding out of course. [Laughter] I’ve never been this age before and I always tell people that. when I make a mistake, “Eh, it must be my age. What else is going to happen?” You know I tell someone younger than me, “Can you tell me? What else is --?” You know, I said, “I ain’t never been this age before,” I said, “but inside of me,” I think the word is chronologically, “I’m, I feel like a guy not much older than you, ok?” I just feel like that, I can hang out in the candy store still in the sense. Though I wouldn’t do it, my intelligence wont allow me to be that person because you do have to act your age within [Crosstalk] reason you can act your age. Not because you think lets just say that a person 65 or 60 or whatever or 50, should act a certain way because my father, my mother, you know you go by that. well, people are different even though everybody is in some ways the same, but you know something? Inside the person, is a different person for each person, ok? And that’s a fact, at least I feel that way. I know I’ll be 65 next month, but I don’t feel ready to be 65 yet.

BP: When is your birthday?

PH: December 21st. Four days before Jesus. [Laughter] Somebody had to make the you know, the way. [Laughter] So, the thing is, as my age is what it is, I have no angles about it because I'd rather be 65 than not around, ok? That's the alternative. Be this old or be mold, ok? And that's how I look at things, and when people say, "Well you old," I say, "I'd rather be old than mold," you know because everybody knows that's dead you know. So, now, I had some things you know I have kids, young, not of my own, but young people that I speak to sometimes. They're always asking me questions about the era and all, and I [Laughter] I guess, they, cause I've always done it even when I was younger, I have this habit of, I have to talk the way I have to talk like I'm around – when I'm comfortable and like I'm, no matter where I am, I'm like around the block when I'm comfortable. See I'll put on a, I use the term façade because the particular thing that I may be involved in calls for it. Like you have to come off Mr. Intellect sounding, no slang, you know from this ain't the street, and I really do respect that and I will act that way, but I'm more comfortable around the block really. That's the term I use you know. Now even on my job, sometimes I, "Boy I coulda sworn I was talking to –," you know because I've been here so many years so I get comfortable when I, even when I get answer the intercom when one of the tenants call, "Your call, I'm Paul, what do you want?" Or "It's your dime and my time." And I do things like that, but I'll look at the apartments. See but I'm not stupid, that's what I'm saying. There are some people you can be yourself with and they'll get a kick out of it, and its meant to be that way when I answer like that, I'm not being disrespectful, you understand? I know who's calling me and I know they'll get a kick out of it because they don't expect to hear someone saying the things that I say. One

tenant said, "I could have sworn I was talking to a black guy." I said, "Well in some ways you are." You know I said, "I know I get too comfortable sometimes I forget where I am. You know, but I knew it was you, and I knew you'd understand." I don't, I let it be known where I'm from to tenants, and when I do have conversations with them. Tenants that didn't grow up my way, and I let them know, and this is not a complaint. I had a lot of fun in the street playing street games and stuff like that. Toys? Let me tell you something, my mother, I remember standing on line at the precinct for a checkerboard game. You know at Christmas time and stuff like that. I got called out at my class, "Himmelstein go down to the 3rd floor and see Ms. So and so you know, they want to see you," and they would never say at first what its for. It might be the dean or something, and I would have to, oh, I know I didn't do nothing wrong, and I'm thinking this while I'm going there. What the hell do they want? And there was always a room, even today I'm sure they have it, in the school system, under the stairwell or something. Where donations obviously came in, clothing, and we were that kind of family that we got free shoes. I can say one thing though, 612 was the school, 611 was for bad kids in Manhattan, you know cause a couple of my friends went there they got transferred from the neighborhood school there you know when they considered you a bad kid.

MN: Is that like a 600 school?

PH: Yeah, a 600 school. 612 was a school in Manhattan, that at a certain time of the year they would notify certain families, "Here take this home to your mother." Like schools do, and, "Bring back, she has to sign this." And I didn't know what it was at first, but what it turned out to be is, you're going to go to 612 to such and such, that was a school, this particular school, and you get free shoes. And we used to get, like brand new, brand

Interviewee: Paul Himmelstein
Interviewer: Dr. Mark Naison and Dr. Brian Purnell
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new shoes, it wasn't a hand me down thing. And I never forgot things like that, brand new shoes, you know, not stylish, just brand new. And then in your own school, I remember, in elementary, PS 54, being called out the class at times, "Himmelstein go to the 2nd floor, see so and so teacher, they want to see you." So I would go, you know, I might have been in 3rd grade or something like that. And they'd take me into this room and there'd be all kind of clothing laying around. Used clothes, and try this on, try this coat on, try this on, try that on. Certain things would fit. Sometimes there was some nice stuff because it came from people who were well off and it was like stylish and I grew up getting things like you know you would, I grew up most of my family, we grew up getting things like that family. We had parts of the family, you know uncles and stuff that were doing better, they only had 2 kids and stuff like that, our cousins and stuff. When they bought next years new stuff for their kids or the kids grew out of things, they would call our house, "Send a couple of boys, send the boys over we got a box of clothes, you know Stanley's clothes and blah blah blah blah." That's the kind of family we were. So you'd go there, I remember going there to pick up, to my aunts and uncles house and they'd have a couple of carton boxes, and bring it back to my house and we'd look through it, and whoever it fit, it fit. Sometimes, occasionally something would fit 2 of us, you know and here comes the fight, and it might be a nice jacket or something. "Yeah, but I went and got it!" You know, this is, you're giving your reasoning. "Yeah man but you always get -," this is how big families are. You know, but I grew up that way. so like I said, you don't think of yourself as poor, I never thought of myself as poor, but obviously we were poor, except we weren't hungry poor, you know what I'm saying? And that is why my father periodically, as we were growing up, probably at times when I was real young and still

didn't know till a time when I got a little bit older and I did know, you know, they went to court because the landlord was trying to get us out. We don't pay the rent on time; he gets it in a month, but not on time. He wanted the first, but, and that's just the kind of life – when you look back on all this, and like I said, I had to learn, I had to learn let's just say my college was the street, ok? In school I didn't have a shot, ok? I wasn't like I said scholastically inclined as others; you know a few people in my family were like that you know. it was later on in life, self taught ok, myself? I mean I had to read dirty books, and I mean that, to learn to read. You know, you always try to get out of things because everybody could read, almost everybody when I was growing up, and you know the world was, school was humiliating, and I'm not knocking school mind you, you have to look at it from the other kids, the kids point of view. When you can't do something everybody else can do, scholastically speaking, its humiliating constantly. And you have to do this every single day of your life until you grow out of it. You know you grow up and get out of it. So in the meanwhile when you're in school you have to be very cunning to keep that a secret. That teacher I told you about, for a while, sometimes you can't get out of it. Sometimes, for years and years you get around, "I gotta go to the bathroom!" when its happening you say, "Oh shit," because you know everybody's going to take a chance, everybody's going, "Alright, this row of seats, read from the book," we all had the book, you read a paragraph and so on like that. Some kids could read better than other kids, there were other kids like that, but I was the kid that didn't read good and fast. I read very slowly, like that kind. I had to study the word; its not that sometimes I could get it, but you cant read like that. You gotta – and you're trying to pronounce the word and stuff like that. And then there's phonetically, and things like that, and sometimes you made a

mistake, sometimes you got lucky, you know? Most of the time, you were wrong because that's the way it was. Nobody bothered to find out if me or other ones in my family had a problem. That we would never, like today they do things like that you know. They pay more attention in today's world, and even further back a little bit in time, but no one saw a problem even when they saw it, and then you try to hide it of course always because you got your friends, everybody takes for granted everybody can read and write. It's just something we all take for granted. I had a brother who couldn't read, I mean at all! And he was married with kids and all that stuff. He never could, he had it very bad scholastically. I like I said, I picked up, school didn't teach me, I taught me. Now I'm no genius at reading, I can read a newspaper and things like that, I couldn't then, I can do it now you know? I spell better, but again, I'm not college material ok? So I really didn't give a damn that I was asked to leave school. It was a break, I consider that a break because I'm in high school now, and I didn't even learn what I should have known in Junior High School. But that's how it went back there, when you grow up in the 40's and stuff. You know 40's, 50's, and all. If you, it was when I noticed, they didn't have –

MN: Had there been a lot of kids like that?

PH: There was, there was. You find this out later on when they get busted. You know, you get busted. So you really had to be clear, and I got a feeling, and I'll be honest with you, its kind of like – and I'm going to tell you something, its my belief, you know, I'm just kind of, I always liked science, ok? All kinds of science from space to medical to anything. I just find science fascinating, and I'm the kind of person that privately studies things you know. I don't mean through a book, I take notice of stuff you know and I watch different things, and you know, "Ohh," to myself I'll say. You know, "Alright,"

and I'll watch personalities and how different people react to different, this that. And I was always forced to be cunning lets say, to protect my pride from being looked as stupid. I never felt stupid you know what I'm saying? Yet, when you're growing up back in them days, your peers, to your peers who could pick up a book and read and all that, you're stupid if you can't. You're just stupid, you're dumb. But you could be smarter than them. There's different kinds of smarts, and you have learn that in life. You could be a genius kind of person just to use a word, ok, with common sense. I know people that I've given common sense advice on issues or things like that. To look at something in a certain way just by my common sense and hearing the problem or whatever, that was scholastically way ahead of me, but they couldn't handle certain things. "What do I do?" They could read the whole thing, and, but I, I had to learn to be you know very cunning and have a lot of good common sense to survive. It makes sense if I do this, you know, that, let me look at the, privately, I'd have them thoughts you know. And I came up with things, and I took advantage of what I could do good, to make, you know, and I lived in a lot of furnished rooms when I made money, some were dumps, but they were still, it was a place to go, like I said from the time I was 17 I became homeless. The first thing I did was go to the pool hall and start hustling and make real money. Back then, real money was like \$10 depending on the size of the room you got. \$10-\$15, you got real good room if it was \$20 a week.

MN: And you could get that in the neighborhood?

PH: Yeah, yeah, within the area, yeah. There were rooming houses. If you got a room and you're paying \$20 or \$25 you got a kitchenette in there! That's like a studio apartment back then. See, the side, I have to tell you something, I've lived, [Laughs] I laugh, but

thank God I can laugh at it now, but I've lived in places as big as this. This was home to me, just enough room for a bed, a dresser; you know that kind of stuff. There was a lot of so called community bathrooms and things like that. I've had to live that when I was growing up, and it was 2 sections of my life. The early part of my life from 17 into my 20's, and there was when, when I didn't make room rent, you know you had your bad days too. Even if you're good at something, sometimes you just couldn't make no money that particular week, and its rent time every week when you got a furnished room. You have to go. And I had to go, and I would take whatever little goodies I had of myself and put it somewhere where it could be kept, somebody's house or something. Until I made some money in the streets, and until then, I slept on roofs, rooftops. I mean outside cause in the winter time you were indoor. I've done all that kind of stuff. You know when I look at the people, with what, and I never blamed nobody because it's nobody's fault my life. It's the way life went, you understand? And when I hear of things on the news, "Well I never had this – And I never –,” that ain't an excuse to stab that person because they got more than you. That ain't an excuse to rape that girl because you had a lousy life. so what? I mean, I'm not glad that you had a lousy life, but you ain't, it ain't ok for you to do that, and that's it. That's my attitude. Let me tell you something, there were guys, you know you get to meet people in the street that are in the street too you know. And those particular, some of them people, would do that, knock someone in the head to get that money because they don't know about nothing else. They're not good at playing pool, they're not good at other things. So the only thing they can do is rob somebody if that's it. And that's what they would do to get their money. Oh you know, buy a \$5 bag of reefer, went and they got it, and sell joints. Because back then you could get a \$5 bag of reefer

and make 30 joints out of it. And it was always quality, with the product in them days you know. so if you're selling them singular, there used to be a thing called a 3 for 2, you know, \$2, 3 joints, you know like that. You did what you had to do to survive, its as simple as that. Now I was never into drugs you know, some of my family was, but not into selling. I mean they got caught up in it, I always thought that was ignorant to me honestly. I've tried different things as a kid, just to try it. But I had this scientific reasons for things. I want to know like a scientist wants to know. Now I know, oh so this is how it feels. But I also know from life, ground me, yeah, but if I keep on, yeah, these great feelings to get like this, you know that utopia feeling, but that's only at first. Then you need it, and then it doesn't give you that utopia, now you need more of it. I was never stupid that way of things that I've tried in life. I never made a habit of anything except cigarettes, and I was a chain smoker, and I cold turkeyed that. And I learned things about myself as time went on, you know after divorce and things like that. I'm a stronger person than I thought I was.

MN: I'm going to have to crash you –

PH: Oh no, I'm going to have to put my stuff away and let you – [Crosstalk]

MN: Well I'm going to make a copy of this, so you finish up with these guys because they have –

PH: Well, they finished. This is running or it's off? Oh, well anyway –

MN: No, I mean, some of this stuff you're saying is stuff we needed because see a lot of the people we've interviewed are the people on the one and the two classes. They're the people who the academics came easy to, and we've always said, there were so many people, what happened to those kids who couldn't read that easily? Who the teachers

didn't like make a fuss over you know, what happened to those people? We're not interviewing them, they're not talking, some of them are dead.

PH: Well you know, its embarrassing or humiliating, lets put it like this, for a lot of people, and I can speak for a lot of them, back when, but I'm at an age now, I don't give a damn what you think, you know what I mean? I don't think of myself as stupid or dumb, I haven't been around the world –

MN: [Crosstalk] This is what we have been told about what is school is one of the most powerful things we've ever had. It's really important that you've given a voice to thousands of people.

PH: Well, I hope it helps them I'll be honest with you.

MN: TO people who are not here to talk.

PH: You know, I didn't think, I thought I was here to talk about rock and roll, and I don't think we hardly talked about the rock and roll period you know, which is ok.

MN: Well, come back to talk about –

PH: No, no, its ok, I don't mind, I didn't really mean to get into my personal life but you started asking me questions.

MN: No, but this is the stuff we want. We want to bring this community to life, and with real people as they really lived, and that's what's so great about this.

PH: See, I like to think that I turned out ok, with the negative part of my life being what it was.

MN: You didn't hurt anybody though?

PH: No, no, [Crosstalk] Listen, I walked down streets until I could make money my way. I wasn't going to hit nobody in no head for money.

MN: I mean, I don't see where it's negative if you don't hurt anybody, to me. That's –

PH: When I say negative I mean as opposed to a positive way of life, a positive kind of lifestyle. That's what I – I don't mean it in a bad sense. Negative like doing bad, and you know economically and things like that. Scholastically and things like that. That's what I mean. It's a disadvantage, that's what it is.

MN: Right, but –

PH: See you gotta get smart in another way, that's why I'm trying to say there's a lot of ways to be smart. You understand? I don't consider myself like no genius, but you know something, I had to be, like I said, I had to have a lot of good, it's like a blind person who hears better than you and me because they can't see they hear better. Well it works the same for people who are not scholastically inclined, but they can be smarter than you. If you couldn't let me put it this way, you being scholastically inclined, and let's say for some reason your mind went blank and you're not scholastically inclined no more, but now you're a grown person and you don't know nothing else but to fill out an application and get a job.

MN: I got an example of this, friends of mine in like the early 70's moved up to rural Maine, way out in the sticks, they bought a house you know no electricity, no running water. Next door is this family that people would call white trash, and that family, the man could do anything. He could fix anything.

PH: That's what I'm talking about!

MN: He worked through the winter. And you'd look at them and you'd say, this is like right out of Appalachia, and they could do – and this man was unbelievably gifted in so many ways.

PH: That's right! That's exactly my point! You can be gifted with the mouth, you understand? You can be gifted, you can fix anything. You're not a carpenter, you're not a plumber, but you know a little bit of everything in that way, and with your hands you're good, and you can make money that way. And that's that. I'm the kind, I drive a car, but I can't tell why my car won't go, and it could be a minor thing, I could look under the hood, and I don't know what the hell I'm looking at. And sometimes the guy says, "Oh here's the reason. This plug came out." So, you see what I'm saying? That's not my forte.

MN: But you know, what you've told us, is just, we needed this.

PH: Well I hope I helped. I didn't know why you wanted to speak to me or, I thought it was about rock and roll, and, but somehow we got off that track, and into my life.

MN: Well, it turns out your life is a window into a lot of people whose lives it's important to us –

PH: Is that mine?

BP: Yes.

PH: Where's the thing it came in?

BP: You have it.

PH: I have it?

MN: You have it, I'm going to make a copy of this, and then why don't we –

[END OF INTERVIEW]