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Hinds, Burmadine

Hinds, Burmadine. Bronx African American History Project
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Interviewee: Mrs. Burmadine Hinds

Interviewer: Dr. Brian Purnell

Date: September 18, 2007

Brian Purnell (BP): Are you ready to begin or—today is September the 18th, 2007. We are at the Williamsbridge branch of the National Council of Negro Women in the Bronx. We are conducting an interview with Mrs. Burmadine Hinds for the Bronx African American History Project. Ms. Hinds if we could begin with you spelling—saying and spelling your first and last names for the record.

Burmadine Hinds (BH): My name is Burmadine Hinds, B-U-R-M-A-D, like in dog, I-N-E; Hinds, H-I-N-D, like in dog, S.

BP: And Ms. Hinds, what is your date of birth?

BH: 8-1-39.

BP: And where were you born?

BH: I was born in Valhalla, New York. That's in Westchester County. It was called Grasslands Hospital at that time, now its Medical Center.

BP: How did you come to live, do you live, how did you come to work and live in the Bronx?

BH: When I was, my mother was an unwed mother and she couldn't keep me so a family of Mr. and Mrs. Hattie Brown who lived on 229th Street here in Williamsbridge became my foster parents. I came here when I was 8 months old, and I've been living here ever since.

BP: Wow, so perhaps we could speak a bit about Mr. and Mrs. Brown. What were their occupations?

BH: Ok, Mr. Brown was next to the youngest of five brothers that I know of, [telephone ringing interrupting her speech] and one day he came, one was a realtor, or real estate, and one lived—two lived, no one, three of them lived in the Bronx, that was John Brown,

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Benjamin Brown, and my father Thomas Brown. Let's see, John Brown was in Brooklyn, and there's one more, Luther, Luther Brown, I don't remember where he lived. I think he lived in Manhattan, I think, I'm not sure; and they owned a lot of real estate up here which is very unusual. Well they were very, very light, and some of them thought they were white; that's how they got over in buying real estate and what not. They lived in Brown, and I guess this is some place also you should look into, Trinity Baptist Church on 224th Street, 808 E. 224th Street. Benjamin Brown was the first chairman of the trustee board for that church. In fact, he left his house for the church. There's a lot of history in that church because a lot of my Sunday school teachers and what not, we all came out of Trinity Baptist so there should be some archives of history in that church. Now there was a group of Negroes they called at that time. They had a club and I have a picture, and I'm trying to remember—we're going to have to come back to that. It's been, it was in Williamsbridge, but [undecipherable phrase] but it was a club but all the people, all the so called elite, that's it, you know, but it was really a caste thing, it was really dark skinned, light skinned, you know that was going on up here. They controlled most everything that went on up here. I have to really think about that more and give you information, I forgot such in my mind.

BP: But Thomas Brown was—

BH: Thomas Brown was my father, my foster father. He was in insurance company on John Street, he was head of the mail department.

BP: That was in the Bronx?

BH: No, John Street in Manhattan.

BP: And Mrs. Brown? Did she work?

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BH: She did not work. She was a retired, not retired, she was a school teacher in Maryland. She was from Maryland. [Telephone ringing interrupting her speech] She came to New York very young, and when she came to New York she used to sew for actresses. One of the people she sewed for was Joan Bennett. [Intercom overshadows her voice] Made some— [Knock on door]

BP: I'll just pause this.

[INTERVIEW CUTS OFF, BEGINS AGAIN]

BP: You were speaking about your mother, Mrs. Hattie Brown, and you were saying that she when she came to New York from Maryland she was a seamstress.

BH: She was a seamstress and she sewed for movie stars and she sewed for the Bennett sisters, Constance Bennett and Joan Bennett. And she used to make thick underwears, undergarments for the ladies. Very delicate sewing, hand sewing. She made a very decent salary at it. She met daddy, they got married and they moved up to Williamsbridge and she didn't do that anymore. She became a housewife and then she started taking in foster children and she raised 4 of us. Five, six, she raised 7 foster children.

BP: Was there a particular agency that she—

BH: She worked out of the agency in White Plains, New York.

BP: I was curious about the foster children, was this through the Corodorphin Asylum or was it another—

BH: No, I think it was through New York State.

BP: Ok, New York State. I'm wondering if, in speaking about your parents, we can talk about your memories of the black community in this part of the Bronx during your early childhood or even before. So you had mentioned something that a lot of people we

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interview touch on, but don't often discuss in depth, and that has to do with different skin color and how that shapes, how it shaped—

BH: Unfortunately.

BP: Right. Could you speak a bit about that in the context of this part of the Bronx during I guess we're talking about the early 20th century.

BH: Yes, ok, unfortunately, lets but it this way, there were 3 main churches up here. One was St. Luke's, which is Episcopalian church, and most of the light skinned Negroes went to St. Luke's, including my father. My mother did not go there, she was brown skinned. My mother went to Butler Methodist Church where the brown skinned folks lived, and the darker folks went to Trinity Baptist where the Reverend A. Carter was the pastor. I went to Trinity.

BP: So even within your family, your parents went to 2 different churches based on their color?

BH: I mean they don't say it, but it was obvious, you know when I got older to know, to recognize and know.

BP: But now, some of your uncles were involved with Trinity.

BH: Just Benjamin Brown.

BP: Just Benjamin, he was –

BH: He was the darker of the 5 brothers, but he wasn't—let me see his complexion I could say, he was like a light brown, light, light, almost like your complexion, yeah.

BP: So he was able to be—he became a leader within Trinity?

BH: Trinity, yes.

BP: That's fascinating. Did your parents own their own home?

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BH: They owned the homes. They owned—in fact, they owned a beauty par—I'm sorry a funeral parlor in Manhattan called the Florence E. Brown Funeral Home, they owned that.

BP: Do you remember where that was located?

BH: No, I know, I know, I know, I just passed it the other day.

BP: Is it still in existence?

BH: It's still in existence.

BP: Oh, well I can look it up. So they owned property as well as a small business or businesses.

BH: Our family owned 3 houses. One on 233rd Street, what was the address? I don't know the address, or I'd have to get it from—229th Street they owned two. One was 826 E. 229th, where I lived, and the other one was 759? No, 758 on 229th Street

BP: The properties that, aside for 826, the other properties, did they rent those out?

BH: No, Uncle John lived on 231st and Uncle Ben lived on 229th, down the street from us, and that's the one that he left the church, to Trinity.

BP: So perhaps now that we're speaking about this neighborhood, what was your memories, your earliest memories of living in the northeast Bronx, this is I guess the early 1940's. What did this part of the Bronx look like?

BH: Oh it was beautiful. It was tree lined, it was the mostly, you know one or two family houses. There were like, I don't know how to call it, there were cafés of blacks like 29th Street was one, where there was more than 3 or 4 black families where we lived. In the next block where my uncle lived it was 700 block, I think he was the only black in that block. 224th Street where Trinity was had quite a few blacks. So separate pockets, I guess

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that's the, there were pockets of blacks. We would ride the train, as you came further up there were no blacks on the train. Sometimes you were the only black getting off the train. So it was a tiny neighborhood, tiny, beautiful neighborhood. Surprisingly, there was really, I don't remember any racial problems with the Italians, only with us. [Laughs] But I don't know if I was spared or just wasn't involved, but I don't remember any of it.

BP: So you didn't have any direct experience with—

BH: No, not with the neighbors or anything. We lived next to a white neighbor named, Poppagallo.

BP: Poppagallo?

BH: Yeah, and he used to give us things and you know he was nice to us and you know we were just neighbors. It was a good neighborhood for me. There were no problems.

BP: So did you remember, this is something we hear a great deal when we do oral history interviews on African American history in New York, there's a sense that there are certain places that black folks couldn't go, there were certain parts of the neighborhood that were off limits. Did that type of —

BH: Yeah, well I, I really didn't experience that except when I got older and you're looking for apartments and things. You couldn't go to Pelham Parkway and get an apartment.

BP: So this is when you were a young adult?

BH: When I was a young adult.

BP: Probably in the 1960's?

BH: In the 60's or late 50's yes, because I came out of high school in '57.

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BP: So, I'd like to come back and talk about your time in high school, but while we're on this topic, if you could describe what it was like to try to get an apartment in the Bronx in the late 1950's, early 1960's.

BH: You would call and give them your name and what not and sometimes they could tell by your voice that you were a Negro and they would say you know the apartment was rented. But if they couldn't tell and they gave you an interview to come see it, an appointment rather, you would go and they would look at you and say, oh the apartment is rented. Apartment was always rented. They kept a lot of, parts of the Bronx very segregated, you just couldn't go there. You didn't go to the movies on Pelham Parkway, you went to the movies on White Plains Road. I know I went for a job in the telephone company, it was when it was on the concourse, and they wouldn't even interview me, no. No jobs available. They had this big ad and plenty of people were there. Most of them were Italian, and there may have been a few Hispanic there, but any of the blacks were just turned away right away. You just didn't get an interview, that was the—but you have to understand that I met a lot of people now that I know. They worked for the telephone company run in Mount Vernon; you could get into that one. I didn't know that one, so I went to the one on the concourse, but that was good I didn't get in there because it would have changed my whole life. So they did me a favor.

BP: Oh, I'll lead up to that then, but to go back a little bit, what was your early educational experiences like. Where did you go to school as a child and as a teenager?

BH: Ok, as my first school remembrance is P.S. 21 right over here on 226 on White Plains Road, and it was very nice there. In fact, one of the great producers, Kenneth Hopper went there, we were friends, and he was the one who produced The Wiz on

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Broadway. I don't know if his parents, I don't know, I don't think the Hopper's are still alive, but somebody must have something on that, but he was the producer of The Wiz.

His name is Kenneth Hopper. And I think Universal adopted, I think I remember correctly; anyway, we had, it was mostly just a few of us.

BP: At P.S. 21?

BH: At P.S. 21, it was mostly Italian, but we didn't have any problems. The only problem I ever had was people found out you were a foster child, "Oh you don't have no parents," you know that kind of stuff, but I said that's not racial, that's just—

BP: Just mean.

BH: Mean. [Laughs] But then I went from there to P.S. 103 which is on Carpenter Avenue and 229th Street and I had no problems there. I was popular with both whites and blacks, and I didn't have any problems. One teacher didn't like me, but that was just the personality, and the reason why she didn't like me, I guess this is interesting is that she was doing a history lesson and she talked about the Revolutionary war, and I raised my hand and I said, why didn't you mention Crispus Attucks? She said who? I said Crispus Attucks, he was the first person who died in the Revolutionary War; up in Boston, he was a Negro. Oh we don't want to hear about that. And so I said why? My grandmother taught me; and you know I never shut up, you know I was fresh. So she put me out the class, and then my mother came and that wasn't too good of a—the NAACP would come in here and the woman got scared, the principal told the woman to apologize to me and it was, and they were not teaching black history at the bottom line.

BP: I was going to ask about the—well, I was, the way, the education in your home.

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BH: I could read and write before I went to school. My grandmother used to teach us math.

BP: What was her name?

BH: Her name was Hattie Feld, that's my mother's name, Hattie N. Douglas. We called her Teeny so much I'm trying to remember, Maria, Maria Douglas.

BP: Maria Douglas, so this was your mother's mother?

BH: My mother's mother.

BP: Hattie Anne Douglas is mother of Maria Douglas.

BH: Right. And she used to teach us. Everyday we used to have to sit down with her at least an hour and learn something. So, we were blessed. So I kind of had a head start. So I did the same with my children. They had to know how to read and write, and a little math that's before they got put into the school. And, it paid off, it paid off, I just wish parents would do that. they, you know, work with their children because they're not really getting it all in school, but the kids get it all here. Most parents will come back and say thank you because their children got into the elementary public school they knew things and they were ahead; so they had like a head start.

BP: From participating in the –

BH: From participating in the National Council of Women Child Development Center.

So, I'm grateful for that.

BP: So in your own home, Mr. and Mrs. Brown, your parents, they stressed education and they –

BH: Yes, yes.

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BP: And your grandmother in particular did she in part lessons on African and African American tasks and similar?

BH: Yes, as far as I know, and I'm still trying to find out, my mother she says, your mother was named after Harriet Tubman. My mother, Hattie's name is Harriet, Harriet N. Brown, but she hated that name Harriet so she called herself Hattie and all her places were Hattie. And Momma, grandma Teeny told us that she was named after a great aunt [unknown phrase] that's where Harriet Tubman came from. [unknown phrase] Harriet Tubman. And I still have not pinpointed that down. I'm afraid that there was a Harriet Tubman estate, humanitarian, but estate, but I've still got to go up to Auburn and see the records and see the— just out of curiosity that's all. And my mother was a teacher. That's the only advantage that I had in school with a teacher.

BP: In that incident, your mother mentioned the NAACP—

BH: Yeah, she didn't know them.

[Laughter]

BP: Oh, I was going to ask if she and your father were—

BH: No, they didn't know.

BP: Aside from the church, were they involved in any other—

BH: No, except this other, and the only reason I'm trying to remember—

BP: Oh, the club you had mentioned.

BH: The club.

BP: So it's probably—

BH: They used to have a preacher.

BP: Oh.

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BH: I have a picture. Yeah, it is Civic, it was.

BP: So the Civic Organization. Don't have a picture now?

BH: No, no, I'll find it.

BP: Ok, that's fine. Ok well we can keep, just moving along. You had said—

BH: Oh, after 103, I then attended Evander Childs High School.

BP: Evander Childs High School.

BH: That's where I met Shirley. [Laughs]

BP: And what was that experience like, academically and socially?

BH: Well there I met more prejudice. That's where I really met prejudice in the school system I should say.

BP: So this is about, I guess we're talking 1940—

BH: 19, early 50's.

BP: 1952? Like early 1950's you said, right.

BH: There was a guidance counselor there, I'll never forget her, Mrs. Donahue.

BP: Mrs. Donahue?

BH: Donahue, and she gave my sister domestic sign. And my sister was very happy to have the domestic sign which was cooking. My mother went to school and she went to see Mrs. Donahue, and she said to Mrs. Donahue, my daughter doesn't need to come here to cook, I can out-cook you! So just take that off – Oh no but its good. No, no, don't, she stopped her like with the NAACP. No, so my sister could not have domestic sign, she had to take academic courses. Unfortunately, I had the same guidance counselor, Mrs. Donahue, and I was taking Latin and she said, no I'm going to take off Latin, that's a dead language. My mother came. Parents don't come today. They don't come; when they

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come they come to fight about stupidity. Instead of for the curriculum that their child has. And my mother said, she needs to be taking Latin whether it's alive or dead, that's where she'll be, that's where I want her, don't change it. It's nothing about to discuss. So Mrs. Donahue says, don't I know you? And she says I think you do. I had another older daughter here and you were going to do the same thing. So Mrs. Donahue asked me to be transferred to another guidance counselor because she wanted no more parts of me.

Anyway, I had my Latin, and that's really the only prejudices that I remember in my high school. Everything else, I had a happy young life, I really did. The only fights I had were with blacks. [Laughs] I never had a fight with a white person.

BP: What were some of those fights over? Just anything that teenagers fight about or—?

BH: That we fight about. The kids across the street from us, they were foster children also. But you know what's so funny, my mother and father were very close friends to the couple, the Claiborne's. In fact, they stood up in each other's wings. So, they had foster children and my mother had foster children. But momma, whatever she sat down to eat, we all sat down and ate it. Mrs. Claiborne fed her children oatmeal without milk; she wasn't a nice person to her children. She was a very nice person I mean, but she was awful. And she would buy their clothes from the Salvation Army. Momma used to go downtown almost every day since she didn't work and go to Bloomingdales. And she knew how when the clothes or things came in where they were on that floor, and then they'd walk me down to—she knew how to buy. And not that she spent a whole lot of money, she spent the same money that when everybody went to Alexander's buy, she spent the same money, but she took time to get the better things. So one Easter we went to church, all of us, and the Claiborne children didn't have the nicer things like we had,

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so they started fighting with us. Like we all got beat. Not my mother beat us. [Laughs]

All the clothes, just messed up. It was funny. [Laughter]

BP: Did you participate in any extracurricular activities in high school or was it, did you just do your school work and come home? Did you work?

BH: That's what I was going to say, I didn't participate because I used to take care of a lady that had no legs. What is that?

BP: Paraplegic?

BH: Paraplegic, that's it. And I did that for \$5 a week because I loved clothes, but my momma couldn't you know, couldn't buy, there were 4 of us.

BP: And, I'm sorry, where did you fall in the—

BH: I was number 3. In fact, I was the oddball. She had 3 from this one woman, Ms. Reilly, and she had, I don't know how many children but she had one with us, it was Eleanor, Eddie was the oldest; Eddie Reilly, Eleanor Reilly, and Richard Reilly.

BP: Oh so there were all three—

BH: They were all 3 brothers and sisters, when I was 4. So I was not, they would gang up on me sometimes. So—

BP: You had a job taking care of—

BH: Yeah, taking care of the paraplegic and it was for \$5 a week. And what I would do is buy material and mama taught me how to sew. I would make clothes and that would help me. And my sister Eleanor, we used to call her Bebe because her brother Eddie he couldn't say baby, he would say, I want to go with Bebe so that stuck and we still call her Bebe. So she didn't have the clothes that I, so she would steal my clothes, but I don't

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remember it as anything bitter or anything, it's you know, what do you do. Anyway, life was good, I had no complaints.

BP: When you graduated from high school was there the expectation that you would go on to college?

BH: Yes. And I did go. And then I had to stop because I didn't have enough money to go there, paid some of the fee, it was a city college and it was only the, at that time, the registration fee. You didn't have to pay for the courses. If you paid a minimum of some, it wasn't much, I remember that, but books were expensive. You know, the city they're not like it is today—and they would give us some kind of an allowance. What are you looking at?

BP: No, sorry I'm just checking the tape sorry.

BH: No, no that's ok. They would give us a kind of allotment for books and things and what not. And I went for a couple of years and then I went to the, and then I got married young. And I stopped and I went back, and back and forth until I got my--. I married a policeman from Brooklyn at the time.

BP: So you had said, I guess, you, well, college was something your parents and your, that they stressed.

BH: They stressed me to go, they didn't stress, my sister was not really, or my brother, no, my brother, he loved cars, let me just say that, he loved cars. He was for cars, and came back you know—

BP: Joy ride.

BH: Joy ride, that's the word. And that's so the ambition was to pay for him to get a car, and he was very good looking and the girls used to give him money. But he never made

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it, he never had a car. And I always said I was going to buy him a car, when ever I got the money, I'm going to buy my brother a car, but he got—I guess he called a streetlight, he was going 30-40 I would think, that was really, there was little expectations you know, my mother's expectations of him, and my sister, she just loved boys, she just wanted to get married. That's all she wanted to do; so she finally got married and she was a domestic for a while. My mother told her that you know, I was a domestic, you know, you're not supposed to be a domestic you're supposed to be better than that but she never did that. So you know sometimes you say, and I look and they say, our peoples are violent, yes people's are violent doesn't change but if you have something inside; I didn't do what they do, not that I was better than them, I gave them the same house, same food, same parental guidance and experiences, the same churches, oh my sister would go to St. Luke's with my father, she was light skinned; and my brother would go to Trinity with us. You know so, its individual, its what's in you what you want to do, and you know it was about being sort of if you're dumb its not where you live, you know, its what you want inside.

BP: You said, so I guess all this time when you're going to city college and you're a young adult—

BH: I'm working and going to school.

BP: Where eventually did you find an apartment?

BH: Eventually my first apartment out of the house was in Hunts Point. That's near Citizen Avenue. A 3 room, 4 flight walk up. And I got pregnant and I could not, I never came out because I'm asthmatic, I could not go out on the street. the roof was the next side—I think I found out because I would go up to the roof, you know when I wanted to

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get some sunshine and whatnot. So the room, [unknown phrase] they didn't even know

he had a wife. [Laughs] So, anyway, I finally found a place up here. A black fellow who I went to school with; his father had an apartment. And he helped me with that, so he came back up there. That was with me maybe about a year.

BP: Oh, not long.

BH: No, not long. I couldn't stand it.

BP: So on that, I was going to ask, how did living in Hunts Point compare to living in the northeastern—

BH: I didn't like it at all. They were not friendly, you didn't know anyone, and it was not like a cohesiveness like it was here. I couldn't find a church to go to. I just didn't like it, I was just, determined to get back up here, and I did.

BP: Where did you move when you came back up here?

BH: On 218 in the 900 block.

BP: So I want to just go back to, you said that not getting that job at the phone company on the Grand Concourse, you said that that changed your life.

BH: It did.

BP: How so?

BH: I said I was going to be better, get a degree where they can't tell me no. You know, it just really angry because I knew I was qualified I knew I could pass the test. And friends told me that were working here and the ones that worked at Mt. Vernon, they told me, come to Mt. Vernon and work for the telephone company. I would never work for the telephone company, ever! [Laughs] So, it gave me more determination not to be in a position where people could close the door in my face you know.

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BP: What were some of the first jobs that you had during this time period? So you're a young wife, a young mother, you have you moved back to the northeast Bronx. What were some of the jobs you were working at this time? I guess this is about late 1950's, early 1950's?

BH: Ok, now this is, I got married in the 60's, 1960, but before that I had a job. Now I went down to the insurance company for my father, stuck to the company because as his daughter I needed work. And I passed the test that they gave me, and I went down, I was in college then. And just as I said, and they put me, and they took me, hired me rather, and they gave me this big wheel. And everyday you came in there was big pile of policies and you had to put them numerically between the others and what not so they could be filed into the cabinets, the file cabinets, I hated it. And I moved every [unknown phrase] and I said move up. Get off of that wheel, and I finally gave, and then I went into filing. They started teaching how to write letters on policies and things like that, but I was back in my department.

BP: What agency?

BH: It was the St. American Insurance Comany.

BP: In Manhattan?

BH: In Manhattan on John Street.

BP: On John Street.

BH: One of the same, he was the grand fall, but they had moved up state by that time and he untied me, I don't remember the system, I think I was married when 85 left, and again I'll tell you what he said. After all those years, 30-40 years I remember. I was so mad. I

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said, take it back I don't want it. I'm not giving it back, he said are you crazy? I was like that. [Laughs]

BP: Did you always work in the church as an adult or did you—

BH: No, no I didn't go back to that. When I was pregnant I didn't go back. I stayed home a couple of years and then I went into the hospital field. And I worked my way, going to school, worked as a patient's accounts manager there.

BP: At which hospital?

BH: I started out at South's 5th Avenue, I then went to New York Infirmary, from the New York Infirmary to North 3 Beacon, by that time I was a manager. But people have always helped me, white people, well I shouldn't say helped me, they recognized my ability I guess that's what I should say. But when I was at New York Hospital, I'm sorry, when I was at South 5th Avenue, I was on [unknown word] clip, I was going to school and doing that, and there was a man named Mr. Rossner who was one of the accountants and we'd come into the payroll department needing information and I would give it to him and help them and what not. and then he got a better position at New York Infirmary which is on 50th Street and he called me and he said would you like to come up and be an assistant manager for this patient accounts department. And I said, do you think I could do this? And he said yeah, you could do it, don't even worry about it. So I said alright, passed the test, and it took me, and the woman there was Ms. Rapper and she was the manager and I was her assistant but she could not stand me. She said, I don't know how you got this job, but just do what I tell you. And I was Oh, gosh, I can't deal with this much longer, and I haven't. So I told Mr. Rossner, I don't think this is going to work out, and he said, just do the job, and it'll work out. [unknown phrase] Do the job, learn it, and

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you'll probably end up getting the position. And I took his advice, I did the job, I made myself available to the accountants if they needed anything. I just did, and she didn't fire, and they did offer me the job. And I kind of took advantage of to get my bachelor's in business administration.

BP: Was this still through City College?

BH: Yes.

BP: So, I guess to switch gears slightly, I did want to speak a bit about how you came to be involved in community work and politics. It seems like from listening to your narrative you've always had a bit of feistiness in you, or at least a sense of justice, but how did you then translate that feeling into—

BH: It happened on the number 2 train. I know, it's unreal the things that happen.

BP: Before you begin, I just want to start another file, they call it.

BH: Ok, it happened on the number 2 train. There was this woman, Ms. Daisy George, and I did have some of her archives here down in the basement, in the main floor, that you need to remind me of and see if you can get some of that.

BP: Ms. Daisy George?

BH: Ms. Daisy George. Let me write that down. Ms. George was down on the subway on 225th just like myself and she always had the New York Times, and I used to watch her because it fascinated me, because you know how big the New York Times is, how she could fold it in different ways and read all of it. So one morning she said to me, you're always watching me, what are you watching me for? So I said, I'm sorry, I said, you just fascinate me how you fold that paper and read it. And every morning you read it. She said, you have to read to know what's going on. I said that's true. She said, I notice you

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don't read the paper, I said, too bad I don't like the paper. I read books, I used to read books. She says, what do you do? Very bothered and what not. I said, well, I'm working in a hospital at the South 5th Avenue. She said, that's good, she said, what do you want to do with your life? I said, well, I don't know really I want to do something, either teach, take care of patients, or something, I want to do something where I'm in service and I always had that in my head. She says, I have some service which you can do right now. I said, ok, what is that, she said, I'm going to start a national council women's branch up there, and I'd like you to be one of the ladies, and I said, ok. She said, give me your number and everything, so I gave it to her and she called me and then I didn't hear from her for a while, but by then I had went to the New York Hospital—South 5th Avenue moved down to New York University. When it happened I left the pay roll department and went to the Institute of Developmental Studies because they were like a school but they were in the hospital. Its by Dr. Dorch, Martin Dorch had a grant to develop, to help children in different schools and what not. Children that had different problems. So I applied for that job and I got it, so I was like the office manager or something. And I was down at NYU, so I eventually went to school there because I could get free tuition. So by that time I was down there, I was assistant to this lady named Faye Goodwear, who's son William Goodwear was, and I don't know what he's doing now, was writing shows on TV. I lost track of him, I don't know what's happened with him. Anyway, I worked with Faye and Ms. George calls me and would like to meet at – she's passed away now, she was the first president of the section here. Maybe the name will come to me by the—but it will come. We met at her house, Ms. George says I want you, you're going to do the Constitution. You're going to be the Parliamentarian. I said, I don't know anything about

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a Constitution or parliamentarian. You'll learn, that's ok. So we met several times and we formed out our constitution and what not; which is based on the actual constitution of course because this is a national organization. And they gave me the copy and whatnot. So I went down to NYU to my boss and said, I need 100 copies of this constitution. She said maybe. She said, well you can go down and talk to the fellows who run the copying, I mean, you know that section of the program and see if they may, maybe you could pay them or whatever. But they did it for me. So when I brought this up, bound and looking all definitive and everything, Ms. George was very impressed. How did you do this? Oh I can't tell you that! [Laughter] I was smart enough not to do that because she would be sending me down to – so I became the first parliamentarian for the Council, and she had me in Staten Island doing what we call beehives. What it happened with consumers. We took on the project, our first project was to teach African Americans or Negroes—

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

BP: It just cut off, that's ok.

BH: Oh ok, teach us how to shop, look at the sizes, comparison. Seeing how some black neighborhoods is something that sells in the white neighborhood is so much cheaper than it is in the black neighborhood, the same product. And one of our first, similar beehives that I went out to without in Staten Island. I didn't even know there was a Staten Island. So we went out there and we did comparison shopping. And she formed a section out there. This woman formed from Staten Island, Bronx, Co-op City, I think one more, but I can't remember who's fault, 4 sections.

BP: Ms.—

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BH: Mrs. Daisy George. She was a special—she was very political and very well known internationally, nationally, locally.

BP: Was she from the Bronx?

BH: She was from the Bronx. So there was a lot of history of how got to the—she just died a couple of years ago. She was in the nursing home over there on—I know it I know it, Regent Nursing Home. So some of her things are here and I don't know where the rest of it is really to be truthful. But she had a lot of heart attacks, a lot of things. Another lady that's been up here and very knowledgeable and involved in politics is Ms. Willie Bone.

BP: Yes, I've been—

BH: You talked to her?

BP: Well not yet, we're scheduling an appointment.

BH: She's not well though. You know—

BP: Yeah, which is part of the reason we tried to speak with her as soon as possible.

BH: Yes, she's a wealth of knowledge, wealth, and every politician knows her. Today, politicians yesterday, you know. I'm a nobody, I don't know why they gave you my name. [Laughs]

BP: Well that's not true. Ms. Daisy George, obviously she was an impressive woman—

BH: Oh yes, an impressive woman.

BP: Do you know anything about her background or her history?

BH: I don't know too much about her background, I know she had a brother in Brooklyn, but I understand he died there. She had a son I think.

BP: Was she involved in local politics?

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BH: She was involved in world community. One of the politicians that knew her, she did a lot of work. She started the Susan Wagner Day Care Center. She's the founder.

BP: Where's that?

BH: That's in Eaderall, what is, 11? Its on 229th Street. I don't know the address. But she founded that and named it after Susan Wagner because of Mayor Wagner's wife. She was very in all that. She asked me to chair that board, and I said I can't, my children are young and my husband couldn't stand her. [Laughs] Because she was always taking me somewhere.

BP: So, Ms. George on the 2 train roped you into community organizing and this was when the NCNW in the Bronx first started about 28 years ago.

BH: No, we're 30, almost—

BP: Oh, you've been here in this building 28 years.

BH: Right, we're 39, we'll be 40 years next year I think. It started in 19—

BP: 1967?

BH: Yeah, 66-67.

BP: And, perhaps just to begin to wrap up I guess, I don't want to fast forward through 40 years of history but I have 2 other things I'd like to talk about in this interview. How has the NCNW developed over these 40 years from doing the beehives?

BH: The consumer beehives.

BP: The consumer beehives and what was to now, running a child development center. I mean, that's—so I'm wondering if you could speak about that progression. But then, within that too if you could just speak a little bit about your own development because you went from doing the parliamentarian work to you know the board of the local

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NAACP branch and being involved in other civic organizations. I guess, how did those 2 develop side by side?

BH: Ok, that was our first project, the consumer beehives, you know consumer education. When we felt that we wanted to do something more and it goes back to Mary McCloud Bassoon, she left a legacy, and one of the things she left in her legacy was we must develop a search for education and we are responsible for our young people and because they're the future. So we tried to think of something we could do to help young people. Some sections they have, they deal with the elderly and do things for the elderly. Some deal with the hospital type thing, but we wanted to do something with children and education. And that's why Ms. George started the Susan Wagner. And a lot of women that were on the National Council in north Bronx, we're north Bronx section, not Williamsbridge, I meant to say that. Williamsbridge is the NAACP, but we didn't want to use that name so we just said north Bronx.

BP: North Bronx.

BH: In fact, their first president just died too. The first president and founder of the NAACP, William, not I'm sorry, Leroy Bennett, he was the first president of the NAACP. Sarah might know something more about that, or Shirley, I know who will know Ms. Bone would know because they remember the old—Ms. Bone was a little more older than I am so she was more involved. So I myself did not get involved with the Susan Wagner because my children were still young and I was going out enough now and I just didn't dare, and another thing to my faith here. So I continued service just to the National Council of North Bronx, and once I was a parliamentarian, I was the secretary, I was the financial secretary, I was the treasurer, they put me in up. And vice president, and finally

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I became president of the section, back in, and I'm going to tell you, 1990? I think it was 1990 I became president.

BP: And you're still the current president?

BH: No, you can only stay president 4 years. You know you have to come out, you can come back, but I became a—this is a section, I got involved in state, and I became the state treasurer for the NCNW under Eva Daniels who was the state convener. And then from there, I started attending conventions, and that's another thing, I always volunteered to do something in the conventions. So I got to be known, and people got to know me all over the country. And I sat on the national board, I was elected member law on the national board, the National Council for Negro—and I was there 4 years. I guess I'm a people person, not that I'm that brilliant or anything, but I'm a people person and I like people and people seem to like me, and that's how I kind of moved up. It wasn't because they thought I was brilliant. They thought I was capable, but there was someone next to me who was capable and someone on the other side who was capable, but I don't know, they seemed to gravitate towards me. And I have lived a life in National Council of Negro Women exposed to things that I would have never seen or done, and I just sometimes I look back and I say, you know, how did this happen, and you know I think of Daisy George, and that's just, she's the one.

BP: So, this, youth development center.

BH: Ok, what happened is we then, when we were, I don't know what year, well it had to be, it's 1980, that's what year it was [Laughs] Ms. George told us that there was a center, this center was first called the Eden, Wake Eden Day Care Center, and –

BP: The building where we are now?

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BH: This building where we are now. And the chair of that, lost the grant. So Ms. George told us, and she told us to apply to ACS, so that's our, ACDS, child development. She said, apply, go and write a proposal. So we all got together, and wrote the proposal, and we applied and we then sent it down, and they called us for an interview. And we were surprised that they called us, and we went, there were about 6 or 7 of us. And talked to them and they talked to us, and we won, we got the nod from the city of New York to run this day care center so we had, so then it became the North Bronx National Council of Negro Women and we called it Child Development Center. Eva Daniels was the chair, Ms. Jessie Collins was the vice chair, and I was the 2nd chair. Ms. Collins dropped out because she was the chair of the E-board, that's another person you need to talk to, Jessie Collins.

BP: Jessie Collins.

BH: She was the executive director of the Emore Gun Health Neighborhood Services.

BP: Should I pause this?

[Knocking at door, long pause, background noise]

BP: We can finish up in 2 minutes.

BH: [low mumbling]

BP: Oh there's something going on.

BH: I'm going to leave here soon anyways, I can't take it, I'm old and tired.

BP: Yeah, it's not easy work. You were saying that Jessie Collins?

BH: Yes, she's another person you should talk to. She was the executive director of the Emore Gun Health Neighborhood Services. And did a lot of good work in this community and out of that organization came— [mumbling] Lisa came. Lisa. And she's

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a person you could talk to because Lisa works with Cuomo, Governor Cuomo, she used to be his assistant. She worked with—right now she's working with the district attorney.

BP: Oh, the district attorney. Oh yes, we've spoken with her in the past.

BH: Ok, she, her last name is Ronsley. Ok, that's another person because she came out of Eden. She came out of Eden One and she was moved up and did a lot of good work.

BP: So the initial board for the child development center was Jessie Collins but she moved away.

BH: Yes, she was the first vice chair.

BP: And you were the second, and who was the president?

BH: The chairman of the board was Eva C. Daniels.

BP: And so this is, you've been involved in this—

BH: I've been in this section. I became chair in 2002. I favor 2002.

BP: So I just, one last question because I know there's people banging down your door. You've been in this neighborhood, you've lived in this neighborhood your whole life, except for that one—

BH: For about a year and a half.

BP: How have you seen it change? Have you seen changes?

BH: Oh my God, have I seen it change? I'm so hurt! It's not today what it used to be. it's like people don't care, it was clean, it was, you could walk the streets around at night, you didn't lock your doors. Now the drugs are taking over the neighborhood, and I hate to say it, I hate to say it, and its us that brought the drugs in, and truth be known I guess the real trouble is that the Negros that brought the drugs in, and I hate to say that but it took over the neighborhood. And I remember, I remember, I remember I was coming

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from a meeting with the NCNW and a good friend of mine, who I had brought in to NCNW, but she became president before me, I wasn't really to be president of anything, and I said to her, Juanita, we need to do something, I was in my 20's, mid-20's. Do something? Drugs are going to take over this neighborhood! And this is why, that was in the 60's. Every place is selling drugs. It's the son shooting across here from, and I fear for the children. You know they're shooting out here, and its just young people, young people, young people being killed. And it seems that we've forgotten up here. But the NAACP are joining boards to help this fight, and the NCNW and a few other organizations, we're trying to get with the community board, go there—see I don't want to be on the board because I'm too old, I feel, there's other old people sitting up on that board, they will not step down because once you get in you just stay there like forever. They need to step down and let the young people get on that board that want to do something because we're losing the battle up here. We're losing, we're losing. Do something, I don't know exactly what it is, but we need to do something. How come Pelham Parkway isn't like this? How come way over on the eastside over by where [unknown phrase] and all over there isn't like this?

BP: Throgs Neck.

BH: Throgs Neck, that's it. This is a process here of better inequity, I don't know what it is, it's terrible. I was at a meeting this Sunday, and talking to Larry Seagull, and he's trying to get some things together because we need to do something, we need to do something otherwise its going to be desolate land up here. And they're building \$600,000 houses! I don't understand it! Who would buy them? Who has that money? \$600,000 to live in the ghetto because that's what it is. Off the street, work hard to see it like this. I

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grew up here, the most beautiful neighborhood we had. We used to sit on the stoop all night, and now they're driving by, shooting, its really sad. I don't know if anybody even talks like I talk, but I have to tell the truth. It's sad, we need to do something. One time I had, there was a shooting, so I had to, all the kids had to lay on the floor because they shot some young man across the street and you don't know where a bullet's going to go flying. We had to lay on the floor, the ones that are in the front, and we have classes in the back too, but the front rolling by.

BP: This was recent?

BH: Yeah, a couple of years ago. A couple of years ago. I don't, you know, I don't know what to say about it. You need, they talk about 3 youth centers that they're trying to build up here, and that's what we're working on Sunday.

BP: The NCNW is a part of that?

BH: Yeah, the NCNW with the NAACP, and the politicians and some other people. One would be across the street from the 37th precinct. I forget the name of that street, there's a lot there. They talk about that area and they talk about the area on 211th Street, Called White Plains Road, and another area is Bronto Avenue. So there's 3 sides that they're designated.

BP: What was that last street?

BH: Bronto. So we hope that it will be a talk. There's no where for these kids to go, they're in the street. and ocne they're in the street they meet with these drug dealers and fast money and they start. And we offer them a job, for \$8 an hour, they don't want that, not when they're getting \$100 a day or whatever it is they get. So we're hoping that these centers, the PAL is supposed to be a part of it. The YMCA is supposed to be a part of it.

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Lost of these conglomerations or organizations are trying to put this together. And I pray that this will happen for our children. So I guess I came up through, like I said NCNW has been like a, I don't know what to say, I've been so exposed to so many things that would have never happened. I've been exposed to people, places, and things, that have helped me see that there's work to be done and I'd like to be a part of it, and I have been a part of it. I've been to the capital, I watched Dr. Height get her congressional medal of honor, which is the highest honor you get. I was invited, I had my invitation, I couldn't believe it, tears were coming out of my eyes. I've been to, what is it, City Hall, Lindsay was the mayor I had tea there with one bad knee there I was just null. I just remember he was so handsome and so tall and the whole thing. I don't even know what we talked about! [Laughter] And he took my hand, and I just was— so handsome, so present, so tall, and what else? And Albany, and the politicians know me by name. Wow, I'm nobody, what, but anyways, --

BP: I wanted to thank you for participating in this interview this is really a unique and it's a very—it's a unique narrative to add to the collection that we're gathering, I think that, you know when people use this 20-30-40-50, years from now, school children, scholars, librarians, etc, they'll be able to turn to the NCNW in the Bronx and be able to really use your testimony and use this history as a way to talk about some of the important efforts that people have made in these communities. Thank you.

BH: Thank you for letting me participate

BP: I'm going to stay in touch and—

[END OF INTERVIEW]