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Jones, Geraldine

Jones, Geraldine. Bronx African American History Project
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Naison: What's your name mam?

Jones: My name is Geraldine, my name is Geraldine Jones.

Naison: What year did your family move to the Bronx?

Jones: My family moved in 47

Naison: And where did they come to the Bronx from?

Jones: I moved from Madison Ave. we owned one of those Blackstone. And they was going to tear down those houses and make a school, and we sold the house and we move in the Bronx. And we moved in 47. The neighborhood I moved in was anybody, we were the only blacks in the neighborhood.

Naison: And what street was this on?

Jones: Then it was Oak Tree Place. Then we moved from Oak Tree Place on Belmont Ave.

Naison: Right

Jones: 21 Belmont Ave. There I stayed almost about fifty years. I raised my children there. They went to 81. Martin; they went from there to ...

Naison: Oh you went to St. Martin of Tours

Jones: St. Martin of Tours. When I moved in the neighborhood there wasn't St. Martin of Tours got burnt down before I was there. We built the church, and that was my parish that's where my children went to school. They grew up there; they went to college and everything. Well we was the only black people in the neighborhood had a Laundromat on I 80th Street. We were the only blacks in that building that I lived. It was all Italian and Jews. We had a hard time living up there. My husband and me myself had to walk my children to school because the Italians weren't used to the black peoples in the neighborhood. We are close body Italians, nothing but Italians, you know levity. Finally they got used to us, in the long run. My kids was in school everyday my kids would come home with a bruise on them. My husband had to go or I , we finally straightened things out.

Naison: Did they go to Catholic school or Public school?

Jones: They went to Catholic School, St. Martin's. And from there to Aquinas

Naison: Right

Jones: That's Catholic. We are Catholic. They used to, march us to church, those boys in the back of us calling us all kinds of names. In those days we wasn't called blacks, we was called Niger's. That's what they, in those days. Whether you all know it or not, that's what we was called. And finally they began to coming around at us. We lived there; my husband said we sold the house, we going to live here without any problems.

Naison: Now you bought a house there?

Jones: No we didn't buy a house. We bought a house first, umm on over Washington Ave.

Naison: Right

Jones: When we first moved up here we bought a **Lemon**; we took out our money and invested in a **Lemon**.

Naison: On Washington and where?

Jones: Off of Washington and 166th Street.

Naison: Right

Jones: We bought a **Lemon** from some Irish people. We stayed there for about two years. That house cost us more than what we put in it. Then we moved from there up on **Rd.** *not exactly sure of what she said*** in the Bronx where I am now. And that's where I stayed because I lost my husband and my two children, and me myself I'm still there.

Naison: And this is on Belmont?

Jones: No I'm not living on Belmont. Right around the corner, I'm a senior citizen now. I'm eighty-six, so I'm right around the corner now.

Naison: Now how did you get that apartment in that neighborhood?

Jones: Through my lawyer, though our lawyer. My husband hired a lawyer, that's how we got the apartment.

Naison: Now when you were going through all these things, in that Italian neighborhood, did you ever think about moving back into Morrisania where ...

Jones: No, (I'm going to open a window) because in those days they say Harlem, we call ourselves move in, Harlem in those days was in Harlem. Not everybody is going back to Harlem. It is the same as where I am living now. The Italians was running away from us. They was burning down the houses, they was every Friday night we was in the

streets because they was burning house down in the back of us or on the side. The Landlord was paying these people to burn these houses down. I guess you all know about that.

Naison: Now so you lived through the fires.

Jones: I lived through all of that.

Naison: Now the neighborhood you are living in, how far North of Tremont was it where you moved to?

Jones: Just around the corner about two blocks.

Naison: Two blocks north of Tremont. And what year did you move to that apartment?

Jones: Were I'm now?

Naison: No to the one you know you moved into with your husband at Belmont.

Jones: Oh we moved there in 47.

Naison: And how long have you lived in the house you live in now? Jones:

Jones: I've been there for twenty-three years. The building is twenty-three years old. And I was the president of that building; I was the president of that building.

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

Jones: I worked with the community coalition with umm ...

Naison: Was it Jacob? Did you work for the Boston Tercobo?

Jones: Tercobo, Jacob I know when he comes here from his home. We formed the coalition, and I worked with him in that neighborhood until he died. That's right. And me myself was a administrator of buildings. I saved the building where we was living.

Naison: Wow!

Jones: Because they was going to tare it down, and I went to school to study to be a administrator and I saved that building.

Naison: Now where did your children end up going to College after Aquinas?

Jones: My daughter went to, My son he went to what's the one off of. ...

Naison: Not Fordham.

Jones: No, no, no, no my daughter went all the way up, **Leman**,

Naison: **Leman** oh to Leman. Ok

Jones: My daughter went to **Leman**, and my son he went over off of the Concourse, what is the ... Community College

Naison: Community College. Right ok

Jones: In the meantime, I had lost my husband when my kids was still in Catholic school.

Naison: Wow

Jones: But through Mrs. Dates, Estelle Dates, she opened up a way for me to get both of my kids in college.

Naison: oh that. .. Now you husband owned a Laundromat is that ...

Jones: That's right.

Naison: And where was his Laundromat located? What street?

Jones: It was 180th Street between Author and Belmont. And we was the only, and they used to the Italians and the Jews would bring their clothes and they would go to work and they would leave them and my husband would always fold them and give them back.

The neighborhood they got to like us very well. My husband passed away, when he passed left me with the Laundromat so I sold the Laundromat. I didn't sell it right them because it was beginning to get the blacks in the neighborhood, moving in; the Spanish was living there, all ethnicities. Every time you turned around they was breaking in the Laundromat, they was taking stock, they did so many things to me that I was ready to give it away for nothing. The laundry, so you want to say something else?

Naison: Yeah When did you first notice the Landlords burning the buildings around where you were living?

Jones: We lived there about six years before we found out that the Landlords began to burn down the buildings. They even started burning down 180th Street because from 3rd Ave. all the way to Southern Blvd, you could buy anything you want. There was stores all the way, all along there, but after they started burning. They burned down all the way down there was no stores no nothing. Now they got all little town hall.

Naison: Right. I know that neighborhood pretty well because I've worked with Father Flint at **St. Paul's Schools**

Jones: That's my, I go there.

Naison: And Sister Barbara at Thorp.

Jones: That's right.

Naison: You know because that neighborhood was hit very hard by the crack epidemic in the ...

Jones: Very hard.

Naison: In the eighties and nineties.

Jones: Very hard, very hard and Fr Fitch comes to me every Friday at Granby Old Community because I'm not able to go to church because I'm feverish now.

Naison: Oh

Jones: But still that's my parish.

Naison: He's a wonderful person.

Jones: Very good. He changed the neighborhood.

Naison: Yeah I was teaching at Fordham then and worked on the Save a Generation Program, which is the youth program.

Jones: That's him, he was in the Save a Generation.

Naison: Right now do you remember what happened to Tremont Ave. during the 1977 blackout?

Jones: They had the blackout and they looted the place. They looted Tremont Ave. that was the night of my birthday; I'll never forget it. On the fourteenth, we planed a party at my house; my girlfriends said let's take the party upstairs. We went out we was sitting in the streets, all these young men come along with televisions, washing machines, I was right there, saw all this stuff in the streets. Stopping us, we was sitting there stopping by one by one washing machine, television, all this they had. That was some black out; I'll never forget that.

Naison: Now 180th Street was once a business district and it burned?

Jones: It was good. St Martin's they was on the corner of Belmont and 180th Street. There was a factory there; it made all the uniforms for St. Martins. There was a store there also. You could buy anything you want on 180th Street, but now you can't. There's nothing there.

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

Jones: I even helped to sell some of those houses.

Naison: Oh!

Jones: I tried to get people to move in some of those houses. Even the building I'm living in now, I stood out on the corner and I helped people to get in my building where I am now. I sit out in the streets on Belmont, 180th Street and Belmont when there wasn't a light there. The children come from Aquinas; come from the school there on the corner, and one kid got hit by a car and so we formed, got together. I sat out in the street all night long in the cold to get a light on that corner. The policemen come along and said to me if they catch us there again they would come back and I was there. They were going to put us in jail. When they came back I was sitting there, to save a life I'm going to sit here. We got the light there; the light is there. So I got the light there, when I moved where I am now, there wasn't a mailbox there on the corner; to drop mail. If fought and I got the mailbox there, on the corner right across the street from me now on Prospect Ave. and 180th Street I had that light put there, for the senior citizens.

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

Jones: Anything went wrong and I'd go to planning board six.

Naison: So you would go through the community planning board.

Jones: Through the Community Board. And when I go to the Community Planning Board I got what I wanted.

(All Laughing)

Naison: Now when did you start to have to become an activist? Was this when you were ...

Jones: I started acting in the neighborhood when they started burning down the houses. I started acting in the neighborhood when I see that they didn't want me in the neighborhood. They didn't want us there. They'd call us mucky, they called us everything. Out there and stood behind the curtains and peeked at us, and slammed the door if they see us coming in the house. They didn't want us in there. My husband said we staying here if we have to go through failure, but we stayed right there.

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

Jones: Jones

Naison: Ok Mrs. Jones

Daniel: Were there any Jews or Italians or Irish who were not who were helping you OL..?

Jones: My neighborhood, I'll never forget was Jewish and her name was Jip, the lady named Mrs. Jip, she had a blind husband that was my neighbor, on one side was Jewish so there was Irish next to me.

Daniel: Were any of them trying to help you?

Jones: Help me what?

(All laughing)

Daniel: Were any of them sympathetic to what you were going through?

Jones: They didn't try to help, now when I really got help Sr. Barbara, from North Bronx Jacob moved in the neighborhood, this is when I began to get a little help from the Italians. Not from the Jews, because the Jews went running up to Co-op city. This is when ...

(All laughing)

Jones: Am I right? They went running up to Co-op City.

Naison: Did anybody when you first moved in stand up and say this shouldn't happen? Was anybody willing to stand up for you in the first years when you and your husband moved there?

Jones: When my husband and I first moved there was what you call candy stores. Maybe you young peoples don't know about that, but we knew about that. What they call candy stores am I right?

All: Yeah

Jones: Where you meet where the young peoples meet at and have the sodas and ice cream Sundays.

Patricia: Ice cream parlor.

Jones: Right well this was in the neighborhood. My son and myself and my daughter was on the way to mass on a Sunday. You had to... in those days the parents had to go to church with the children. So I'm walking with my son and my daughter to mass. This

kid walks up behind my son and kicked my son. Right, they were little boys, teenagers. I turned around and I said "why did you do that?" He what they would do to me out on the, I don't know where these young boy come from they all come and they start. I said to my son my son says 'mommy I want to go back, I want to go with Daddy.' I said, "No we going on to mass." We went on to mass, when I got back to the house I told my husband. My husband went in his candy store and he went in that candy store every kid ran. I was so afraid, every kid ran. After that occasion, we had one more confrontation. I never had any more but one more. This time, one of the boys was beating up my son from the school. When he was beating him, you know in those days those girls were wearing those hard shoes.

Daniel: Yes

Jones: And my daughter kicked these Italian boys on the leg with those shoes 'leave my brother alone! Leave my brother alone!' I'm in the house minding my business; these two Italian mothers come to me, (breathing heavy) I'm just saying this, please don't put this while doing what they said ... (Breathing heavy again) That's the way they talk, you know that. I don't know if you all are Italian or not.

All: laughing

Jones: They come 'your son, your daughter, look at the bruises on my son's legs!' And I say "look don't come to me telling me what my daughter did to your son, My daughter's small and your son is here sixteen years old. And your bringing me here this, I don't want to hear nothing. You come here tell you the time my kids come home bloodied and everything bleeding" And I says "And I didn't come to you about it, and now you are coming to me." When I got finished with those two ladies, they was hugging my neck. From then on those kids wanted to sleep in my house day and night and was with my kids all the time, we lived like this. We had no problems. No more problems.

Naison: Now did you get help from the sister at the school or the Priest at the parish when this stuff was going on?

Jones: I did not get any help from nobody but my husband, because I didn't go to none of the Priest to tell him. Mont Senior, We had a Mont Senior there, Mont Senior Blake. Mont Senior Blake and my husband was friends and went on the East Side. Mont Senior Blake he would come and he would talk to us and tell us you know, and he would always 'stay on the good side.' And tell us to stay on the 'good side' and 'don't go from them runners.' He was very nice; he was a good Mont Senior. That right.

Naison: Patricia, do you have any questions?

Patricia: Yeah I would like to ask about the fires. In the aftermath of the fires, what kind of community organizations, what kinds of programs did they do to help build the community backup? Because I know the fires left the communities very ravaged.

Jones: Left the community in ...

Patricia: It did

Jones: Yes, umm we I went down town with Jacob, we used to go all over and wed go down town and we'd all kids of meeting. Well finally got, I don't remember, the company that was willing to come in to help to build these little small town halls. They got money and I trying to say that this company took that money and they disappeared, with the money that was progress to help to build the neighborhood. Took the money and disappeared. So they had him, they tried to catch him to put him in **coke**. Then Jacobs didn't know West Bronx; they decided they would try something else. Well finally we gotten another contractor to come in and rebuild. Started to build the houses on Prospect Ave. was the first one that was built, but now they have a lot of them built.

Naison: Yeah Dr. Ward do you have any questions?

Dr. Ward: Yes, Hi Mrs. Jones. This is a very moving story, I am very deeply effected by what you've been saying. I'm here because I did a history of the first black Catholic Church in Newark New Jersey ...

J ones: Yes I know about Newark. ..

Dr. Ward: The Queen of Angels, it was started by a group of black women who fought really with the church to get that church and found a assistance from Sisters and certain Priests and so on. And what I'm interested in knowing from you is you say you're Catholic. Were you born Catholic they say were you baptized?

Jones: No I was converted into a Catholic. When I met my husband my husband was Catholic and of course I've been a Catholic for many, many, many, many years, my whole life. When my husband says to me before we got married, you gonna be my wife but you got to be in my faith. So I did go and I am a Catholic.

Dr. Ward: And what were you before that?

Jones: I was a Protestant.

Dr. Ward: Baptist or. ..

Jones: Yeah I went to Baptist church.

Naison: Now were you born in New York City?

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

Dr. Ward: Was your husband from the United States?

Jones: My husband was born right here right in Harlem.

Dr. Ward: Right in Harlem, and his family was Catholic going way back?

Jones: His whole family was Catholic.

Dr. Ward: Wow

Daniel: Where in Georgia were you born?

Jones: me?

Daniel: Yes I'm from Tennessee myself so just wondering, where were you born in Georgia?

Jones: I was born in Thomasville, GA. That's near Jacksonville, FL.

Daniel: Way down, how long did you live in Georgia?

Jones: Oh well I left to tell the truth we was small kids, I could give you all a long history but lets cut it short.

(All laughing)

Naison: So you want to save the Georgia stories for another time.

Jones: Right lets cut it short

Naison: Because we can do Georgia stories .another time right.

Dr. Ward: Just a couple more things, so when you went to St. Martin Tares when you came here ...

Jones: St. Martins

Dr. Ward: Was that basically an Italian church or was that mixed?

Jones: St. Martin's it was mostly Italians and Irish at that church. We was the only black persons sitting up in that church.

Dr. Ward: So when you got inside that church, did you feel welcome?

Jones: I felt welcomed because God was with me. It didn't make no difference.

(Clapping and 'amen')

Dr. Ward: And you could sit anywhere you wanted in that church and you could take communion whenever you wanted.

Jones: Any place I wanted. My kids was baptized, confirmed and everything in there. It didn't make me no difference. Even when I was confirmed in the Catholic Church my Godmother was an Italian. So it didn't make me no difference. I sat were I wanted sat, say what I wanted to say in that church and everything, I worked in that church and all. It didn't make any difference to me.

Dr. Ward: Did you belong to some of the umm like that Rosary Society or any of those things? Did you get involved in that?

Jones: Then we had Sisters and we had Brothers, I know you know about them. We had Sisters of the poor, and they'd go around to help. I used to go up to the church and help them fix the baskets and things to take around to the poor and stuff; I did a lot of work in the neighborhood. Excuse me.

Dr. Ward: Thank you

Naison: Harriett, do you have any questions?

Harriett: I just wanted to say I'm a neighbor and that my family came to the Bronx in lets say the 1930's, 1930. And I've lived here ever since with a short time when I lived in Greenwich Village, and I still live here. And you mentioned something about Mrs. Diggs. Now I think she was a New York City umm she was appointed by the Lindsay administration at one of the city agencies and I think she was one of the first black women that had a high position in city government.

Jones: That's right

Harriett: And I think her specialty was housing. But you mentioned that she helped you with the children some how.

Jones: That's right, she helped me to get my children in College, because I had needed it.

Harriett: You needed some help with that.

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

Harriett: So in those days, I'm not sure which days you mean, but I went to Hunter College and I remember the tuition was five dollars a year. That was the Bursar.

(All talking)

Harriett: I mean we knew it was a tall feat, but it wasn't that small because my family didn't have that much money. And but they were very selective about who they admitted. I went to Walton High School, and you had to in order to get into Hunter or City College you had to take a test. And many of my friends also applied at the same time I did and some of them had to take remedial courses before they could be admitted as Freshmen, but I must say my whole family went to Hunter with the exception of one brother who went to Lincoln. But I came here really to meet you because I live right down the street, I live on 168th Street, I grew up on Prospect Ave. and I had heard from Mark that there was a black community that was up around 180th Street. When we were growing up we didn't know anybody up there, now maybe you weren't there then, because we did move to the Bronx in 1930 and our first place where we moved was on Prospect Ave. and 169th Street down to Home St. and then we went further down to 166th Street. But I remember that my mother was a lady like you in that I call you a very heroic pioneer. Because integrating a neighborhood that was all white was a very called for someone with great strength and commitment and I'm hearing your story that makes me feel so good inside because I have memories of some of the experiences but not in the same place, I lived a few blocks away. I used to walk up to Walden High School from 165th Street.

Naison: That's a long walk. Now what street was it on then?

Harriett: Bainbridge Ave. and 195th Street.

Naison: You walked from ...

Harriett: And I remember my friends and I in the springtime, we would walk all the way to Fordham Rd. and we would take that angle where Kingsbridge Rd. and then we cut across and we'd walk, I won't say we walked from Walton Heights because the morning we had to be there on time. But I remember the Belmont area where she is taking about St. Martins, and when we did take the bus to go to High School, of course we had to pass St. Martins, that's St. Martins right there on Crotona Ave. right?

Naison: Right

Harriett: That's where you said you went to that church.

Jones: That's right

Harriett: And I recall vividly what the community on that side on Crotona Park looked like, and it was all white.

Jones: That's right.

Harriett: And as you got to 180th and Tremont, most of the people were Italian, or that was the Italian community I should. But I think before that they were Jewish, *it* was more Jewish neighborhood. But what I was going to say is like we were like in a island in a sense, because we didn't know that there was a black community in the North, North of Crotona. And I'm sure everybody in here has a story to tell about he good old days, but you mentioned Mrs. Dickson. I remember my mother used to talk about Mrs. Dickson because she was a wonderful person. And she was politically connected through Mayor LaFrudier, who you may have heard of.

Naison: So she goes back to that time?

Harriett: She goes back to that time and I have to ask my kid brother who has goes back to the numbers and everything. Umm about her but she was a beautiful person inside and out.

Jones: That's right

Harriett: And maybe you can dig up some, I don't know if she was a Bronx side or not..

Jones: Well Nora urn Lorie Davis took over her place. Lorie Davis took over she ran against her am I right? And Lorie Davis took over her place. Lorie Davis and Estelle Diggs was the very best of friends. I would ride around; I would go to Lorie Davis' house with Estelle Diggs.

Harriett: Davis or Davidson?

All: Davis

Jones: Gloria Davis

Harriett: Gloria Davis, she came much later though ...

Jones: I'm saying Gloria Davis, they were best of friends.

Naison: Now you told me Gloria Davis had been a Barmaid at Freddy's

Jones: Yeah but Gloria Davis too Estelle's place. You know

Harriett: Gloria Davis became the assemblywoman.

Jones: Yes

Naison: She still lives here?

Jones: She lives right across the street.

Naison: Ok umm do you have any more questions, Patricia or Daniel?

Daniel: I have one:

Naison: ok

Daniel: Can I ask you one more question? What you were describing about your children benign beaten up at school, I have two questions. Did the school, teachers, principles do anything to try to stop the beatings.

Jones: yes

Daniel: They did.

Jones: The teacher would talk to the children, but the they would do it when the kids was out of school. If the teacher talked to a kid in the school, the kid would listen. Right when you listen, but when you get out you do what you want to do. That's what happened.

Naison: Ok I'm going to ... (Tape stops and picks up with Mrs. Jones)

Jones: That was Fordham Hospital, on Fordham Rd.

Naison: Right.

Jones: They closed Fordham Hospital down and they was going to build a hospital in the community where I am living now. Instead they never build they took all those houses where the Jews and the Italians moved away from, the black peoples came in and bought those houses. Then they turned around and Fordham Hospital was going to build another hospital there. They took the houses away from the black people; some of them got good money for their houses, some didn't get nothing because they bought them houses from the Italians and the Jews. And they stayed there in those houses for a short while, they took those houses, tour them down, they never built a hospital there. It got a soccer field over there in the back of urn the hospital now, St. Barnabus Hospital Soccer field. And they got a ball field over there by me, which is Jacob's.

Naison: Jacob's Field. Right

Jones: Jacobs field.

Naison: So those were houses that were condemned for houses that were never built. Now I have one other question, Arch pointed out to me that there was a YWCA on Southern Blvd. and they closed it down right at the time when kids needed a place ... What is the story behind the closing of that YWCA?

Jones: I couldn't tell you. The only thing I know they closed the YWCA and that's where the young people that's only place they had to go and they closed it down.

Harriett: I'm not sure, I wanted to say something about Fordham Hospital, that's where I had my first job, I worked in the lab there when I got out of Hunter, I became a lab technician and there was another Hospital on 169th and Maurice Ave, Morrisania Hospital.

Jones: Yes

Harriett: And both of those hospitals were closed.

Jones: Yes well I had a partner had a house in Harlem, right there on 181st Street which she had bought from an Italian from some Italians, lovely house and the city get to her and talked to her and we didn't know what was happening, when we knew anything the city done and took the house. And she said that she never got all of her money back so she moved away from here.