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## Moss, Daphne

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Mark Naison (MN): This is April 19, 2005 at Fordham University and we're interviewing Daphne Moss who has been a nurse, an educator, and a community activist in the Bronx. And our interviewer today is Natasha Lightfoot.

Natasha Lightfoot (NL): OK we're just going to start with some basic questions on your background, first starting with your parents. How did your parents meet?

Daphne Moss (DM): That's a good question, I believe they were dancing, I think - - that they met at a party or a mutual friends - - someone's house - - whatever was going on 20's I have no idea, but they met here.

NL: They met here, and they immigrated from - -

DM: They both came from Jamaica.

NL: OK and do you know what made them both come here, were there any kind of underlying factors?

DM: I really don't know the details. I know that my father came with some brothers and they all decided to change their names on the way here.

NL: Really? Their last names or - -

DM: Their last names. The original name was Moss and Elliot and there's a Jones. So a brother each took a name, so we discovered that we had some relatives that we called cousins that were really cousins because we didn't know that Jones was really an Elliot. I know that sounds confusing, it took me all my life to figure that out.

NL: So your family was Moss and Elliot. Who was the Moss, the father?

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DM: My father was Moss Elliot and that was the derivation and so we used Moss but there were documents that also had Elliot on it, so it got a little confusing. My mother was Myers.

NL: How did they end up in the Bronx? Did they start out elsewhere in New York?

DM: They started out in Harlem I believe. I know once they got married they lived in several places because it was so wide open; the story goes that it was easier to move to a new apartment than to paint what you had. I believe she moved first into Harlem, and then gradually into the Bronx, and when she met my father they moved into several apartments: Prospect Avenue area, and then gradually they ended up on Simpson St by the time I was born.

MN: What sort of work did your father do?

DM: He was several different things - - I think kind of a handy man, at one point I think he was an elevator operator, but then industrial mechanization - - he ended up being a night watchman on one of the Hudson lines and we were superintendents on Simpson St.

MN: What was the structure - - was this a walk up?

DM: Yes.

MN: Four story or five story?

DM: Five story walk up on Simpson St. The building is not there but the building next to it is still there.

MN: Did it have fire escapes?

DM: Yes.

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MN: And where was your apartment?

DM: When we were supers, we were downstairs on the basement level and so the window ledges for a little girl were up high, and we faced the number 2 train - - the 2 and the 5 train passed our house. We were right under the L train.

NL: And what did your mom do for a living?

DM: She was a homemaker with seven children and didn't start working I think until much later maybe when I beginning to start school. She was a domestic – did housework and cooking and I don't know how she did that since no one ever taught her to cook, she just figured it out.

NL: And what was your home environment like as a child? Did you have a social circle that was - - did your parents mix with your neighbors, did they have a social circle that was Jamaican in orientation?

DM: We were the only Jamaicans. Nobody knew what a Jamaican was.

MN: On your block?

DM: It was transitioning from Irish and Jewish to - - I would say even African Americans weren't on my particular block. There was a I think one African American super and then the vast number of people who were moving in were Puerto Rican.

NL: OK and what years would you say - - what year were you born?

DM: I was born in '47.

NL: So this time you're talking about when you guys moved in - -

DM: I was the only one born on Simpson I think, the others all had moved.

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MN: So this was an Irish and Jewish neighborhood transitioning to a largely Puerto Rican neighborhood. What are your earliest playmates?

DM: All Puerto Rican except for one little Jewish girl. We used to light on Fridays the oven and the stove and handles and turn off the electricity - - I learned about Matza and some of the Jewish culture, and the language, etc. etc. from that one family. And I think our landlord was Jewish also, Mr. Kramer. So that's how - - and then it transitions really rapidly.

NL: Say within the first ten years of your life you saw more African Americans coming into your neighborhood?

DM: No, none. Mostly Puerto Ricans.

MN: In school was your kindergarten class mostly white would you say or mostly Puerto Rican?

DM: It was very mixed from the surroundings. I remember it being largely white with a few Puerto Ricans and one or two black.

NL: And this was PS 20?

DM: On Foxwood.

NL: I wanted to ask you, you mentioned that your father passed away. What year did he pass away?

DM: '54.

NL: So you were seven years old. How did your mom manage to support you guys, did she have any family help?

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DM: Very little, but there was some help, some of the aunts, some of the relatives.

NL: Did they come up from Jamaica or were they here too?

DM: They were here already. She got here through an aunt I think they called it you had to have - -

NL: You had to have a sponsorship. OK that's what I was going to ask you exactly who sponsored you.

DM: I have no idea how my father got here, but definitely there was a great aunt who sponsored her and that's how I learned about show money, that you had to have that \$50 to get off.

MN: Show money?

NL: It's definitely documented in the kind of work that Irma Watkins Owens does and a lot of other people who work on West Indian immigration.

DM: You couldn't get off Ellis Island without show money, an address, and proof of health. They looked at you to see if you were sickly or not.

NL: Did your mother ever get to travel back to Jamaica?

DM: No, she never did. And she never really wanted to. It was as though she had cut the ties. However, my father talked about it.

NL: And you didn't know much about it really?

DM: Just the little stories that I can remember. I mean, I was 7 when he passed so I can remember just little things of his talking and I felt that affection for his country.

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NL: And was your mom politically active or a member of any social organizations that you knew of?

DM: No. Just that after he died when I guess I was old enough, we went to church.

MN: Which church was this?

DM: This was St. Ann's on St. Ann's avenue.

MN: St. Ann's Avenue - - how close was that to you?

DM: It was a bus ride. From Simpson St, we walked half a block to Westchester Avenue, took the bus I guess up Westchester Avenue to about right after Jackson, right before that Third Avenue ended. There was St. Ann's Avenue; we could transfer for a bus there. I remember that bus was so slow that we often walked it. Of course, it seemed immense and long then, I don't really know - - but we did a lot of walking across St. Ann's Avenue.

NL: Did you guys feel generally safe walking around your neighborhood at that point?

DM: I remember the transition from fairly a safe area to not safe.

MN: When did you start feeling it not safe?

DM: It was early teens.

MN: So that was in the late 50's or early 60's?

DM: Yes - - I would say '60 would be a good time, I was born '47 - - So 1960 I was 13. I was very much aware then.

MN: Was this something that was related to drugs would you say, or more to gangs?

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DM: A couple of years later it got more intense with the drugs, but just at that time I think it went to a stable neighborhood where you knew your neighbors and your friends to more and more strangers, about more and more things were happening - - more and more crowding and more crime taking place.

NL: Just to back track a little bit, did you have any involvement in the church?

DM: Yes.

NL: What kind of organizations were you and your family members a part of in St. Ann's?

DM: My mother joined the alter guild, so she became the person who set up the alter and put the flowers - - and she got very involved and this was good for her, I guess being a single woman and with all these kids she had raised, grandchildren were starting to come in and I, being the youngest, had no option. The others could say no, so I had to go, and I went to church and I joined the choir. My sister Valerie was in the choir too for some time. And then I also had to go to the Girls Friendly Society of the Episcopal Church.

NL: And what did the Girls Friendly Society do?

DM: When I think back it was so nothing, but I guess it was a social exercise for my mother, and maybe three or four of us, we were in the basement of St. Ann's church, which I can think now, I really knew that place inside out.

NL: And what was the congregation at St. Ann's like?



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DM: Wow - - it's like a blur. I guess it was still very mixed. I think Puerto Ricans were beginning, there was a large Jamaican group because of my family and relatives etc., and then there were probably less of some white families.

MN: Now were your relatives from the Bronx?

DM: Some of them.

MN: From Manhattan also?

DM: Mostly the Bronx.

NL: - - Came directly to the Bronx through your family - -

MN: Now one question I have is OK, you're on a block which is becoming predominately Puerto Rican: is there any point in which you start identifying yourself as Puerto Rican or people start looking - - When you're in that environment, how do you see yourself in relation to other kids?

DM: I had a difficult time. First of all, I wasn't petite, so you had all these tiny little girls who were Puerto Rican and I was 5'7" already in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, so I knew I was not one of the Puerto Ricans. They didn't really identify - - I remember people saying "Where are you from?" and I would say "From Jamaica." And they would say "Where's that?" and I would say "The West Indies," and they wouldn't even really understand - - I would have to explain that it's an island in the Caribbean, it's even bigger than Puerto Rico - - kind of thing, and feeling that sense of pride. I didn't identify with Puerto Ricans. But I was lost in that there wasn't really anyone else to identify with and all my friends at that point were Puerto Rican, through at that point the adolescent period. And

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what I describe as 5'4", little noses, straight black hair, all cute - - and I just didn't fit.

But good friends. And I met a couple of other girls who were a little older.

NL: Were they Puerto Rican too?

DM: Yes. And I have one that I'm still friends with today and one that I just found through the internet, out in the Midwest.

NL: What kind of boundaries did your mom set for you in terms of social life?

DM: That was about it. I think when we went to your lecture and you talked about the Tropicana, I think that was called "International" in my time. I'm not sure, but was that Intervale Avenue? It was a club and that was about as far - - I could go to Hunts Point Palace, I could go to the Intervale place which was called International, I remember Club Cubano, and then that was it. She wasn't letting me go to the Palladium because I was too young or even downtown Latin spots because at this time all of my friends were beginning to go and I was the youngest, so I couldn't go. But I could do the things in the Bronx and we would do the parties in the Bronx - - I mean we would go to parties every Saturday.

NL: And you would learn how to Salsa dance at these parties.

DM: In the hallway of my building.

NL: In the hallway of your building they taught you how?

DM: To this day I can close my eyes and do it. I have a friend whose son is in Iraq right now, he had to get married last year, went to the wedding, had a great party, all kinds of music was played and she and I got up and danced exactly as we danced forty years ago.

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NL: Wow.

MN: In your building. Did she live in the building?

DM: She lived down the street. 1057, I was 1098.

MN: What was your elementary school experience like?

DM: I had a good one, I mean we had a good reading family - - I was in all the One classes. All my friends were in the lower numbers so I wonder why they were able to purchase homes and I'm still in the Bronx - - [Laughter] - - but I guess that's how it works. The families in the building, vertically, we knew all of the families. It was a community within the building before I got to elementary school, so those same people were in your school. And in the surrounding schools - - and in the school yard, there was a very heavy social - - Ms. O'Malley who played with the little kids and then there was things that went on; handball - - all of these activities were going on and I think the different age groups kind of sanctioned. The little kids were with Ms. O'Malley, the boys were playing ball, the girls were getting into handball, there was Double Dutch going on - - all these things surrounded PS 20 so it was a center of activity for all families - - and they gave out lunch too.

NL: And what were your teachers like? Were they mostly women, were they mostly white, were they - -

DM: You know I don't think I had an ethnic teacher other than a Jewish teacher, until much, much later in my life.

NL: Wow.

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DM: But all very good teachers, because I was in the One class, so you had to have the best teachers. The male teachers took care of the bad classes with all the boys that wouldn't obey.

NL: And was this school a little bit more racially mixed than the actual street that you were living on?

DM: I think that it was probably beginning to turn, but at that time because I was in the One class, we still had a few Irish kids, a few Jewish kids, we still had those who had high reading levels because you had to read a high reading level to be in the One class, and that's how you were organized, by your reading level.

NL: And when did you start at Junior High School 60?

DM: I think it was 1960 - - so it must have been either '59 or '60. I was only there two years; I was in the SP class. You did 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade in one year.

NL: Oh, OK. And then you went to 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

MN: Now how far was Jr. HS 60?

DM: It was walking distance, so we often took the bus.

MN: And what was the cross street?

DM: 60 was on Stephens and on Westchester and Intervale, that's where the L - - its Intervale Avenue when it goes up 163<sup>rd</sup> and 167<sup>th</sup> towards Prospect to the club that you have written on - -

MN: Club 845?

DM: Yes, it's not that far away on Prospect Avenue.

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NL: Did you ever - -

DM: I don't think I ever went to 845, that probably would have been more African American, and I wasn't there yet.

MN: So you had an experience where your culture of the people you were with was mostly Latino culture?

DM: Absolutely.

NL: And did you guys use the term Boota Rican to describe you at all?

DM: I did not hear that - - when you said it at the lecture I kind of remembered it, it was a strange thing - - but after a while I was like, I remember that. But no, I don't think they identified me as black at all. I was looked at more as Caribbean or as the strange one that just didn't quite fit in - - but I just wasn't seen as African American.

MN: What about your teachers? How did they see you?

DM: In elementary school it was known that I was one of the Moss children. When I left the 6<sup>th</sup> grade the principal congratulated my mother and thanked her because this was the last of the Moss children. So we were kind of known in the school - -

MN: As achievers.

DM: Right. And so the identity thing, I knew I wasn't Puerto Rican, I think people may have looked at me and thought I was Puerto Rican, but I couldn't speak the language.

MN: Right. Now were there Puerto Ricans on your block who were significantly darker than you?

DM: All colors.

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MN: All colors. So it was a wide spectrum of colors among the Puerto Rican population.

DM: But most of them were no darker than Natasha.

MN: Was the language used - - were you encouraged to learn Spanish? Did your friends try to get you to - -

DM: Yes. I couldn't speak Spanish. I could understand it, but I really couldn't speak it. I have a sister, not the one that you met but another one, that was fluent. I was very hesitant, I don't think I spoke Spanish until I had no one Spanish around me and I became I nurse and I had to speak to a patient. And then I began to lose the inhibition. Otherwise, I could understand a lot of Spanish but I didn't speak it.

NL: So you think that was your own personal thing.

MN: But the dancing came easily to you.

DM: Yes.

NL: Did you find that once you started high school that there were still many more Latino's that you were hanging out with?

DM: No. Once you walked from Simpson St and I went up 167<sup>th</sup> St, towards Morris High School and crossed over and did whatever - - that was definitely an African American population at that point. So I went to school and for the first time, at Morris High School and really saw this vast number of tall men.

[Laughter]

MN: Because you were tall and the guys were all shorter than you.

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DM: Yes, so then it was the beginning of a life.

[Laughter]

MN: Were you listening to the radio in Jr. HS and what stations were you listening to?

DM: Well Symphony Sid I had begun to listen to because we were in that mix of the music where I was strongly - - it was Rock and Roll then slowly Salsa was coming in because all of these people their heritage was Latin, and then it was transitioning and the new music I guess was the Pachanga, which changed everything, it was kind of a new beat and kind of a young people - -

MN: Who were some of the Pachanga artists?

DM: I do not know but I could probably call my friend - - but it started with Pachanga and we were going to these parties, and the parties played everything from Isley Brothers Jump Up and Shout, Jackie Wilson, and then they would throw on Latin music.

MN: OK so this is predominately Latin parties and they would start off with Jackie Wilson and the Isley Brothers.

DM: And we would dance to Shout - -

NL: And you went with your Puerto Rican friends.

MN: So they would start off with African American - -

DM: Well I can't say start off, but very often there was a mix.

MN: What about the Doo Wop? Was that something that you - -

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DM: That was very significant because that's what we would call "Grind 'em up parties," close dancing - - and all the guys did the harmony in the hallways and on the corners.

MN: And this was Puerto Rican guys - -

DM: Absolutely. There were no African Americans on my block to speak of - - there were very few. I can name Skippy and Thurmond - -

MN: Right, but the Puerto Rican guys were harmonizing in the hallways.

NL: Just as much as people describe - -

DM: What is it, the Paramounts meet the Jesters? With all these Doo Wop songs and of course - - everybody knew those songs, they were like religion.

MN: See, we've gotten the other side of it, which is African Americans being absorbed in Latin music, but the same token, Puerto Ricans were being absorbed in Doo Wop and African American - -

DM: Because you danced fast, but when it came to it - -

MN: To slow dances?

DM: - - Slow dances were [Crosstalk]

MN: Everybody was grinding to Maybe.

DM: Even Maybe was already - - so there was definitely - -

MN: Did people listen to Motown on your block when Motown came in in the early 60's?



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DM: Oh sure. And then there was still Elvis. So even though you had Motown you were still listening a little bit to Elvis Presley and the Beatles were beginning to filter in all of this time too, so there was a really wide range is what I found. And then during that period Symphony Sid came in and he would play jazz, he would play Latin, and he would play Rock and Roll. And so when they were stuck in their house in the tenement - -

MN: Now did you ever listen to WWRL?

DM: Yes.

MN: What was the name of the - - a little bit before that, Dr. Jive?

DM: That may have been before - - Make Believe Ballroom I remember.

MN: Did you ever go to the talent shows at PS 99?

DM: No, but my friend that you've been talking to, Ines Myers in California, Ines Robinson, she went to 99 all summer there because I heard about all of those in your lecture and I remember that all of - - she went to Jr. HS 99 and we met at Morris, and she told me about the talent shows and the incredible music and the dancing and she shared that with me. Because when I was at Morris, we had these great shows.

NL: Did you participate in any?

DM: I was not into drama, not at all. Out of school you just didn't have time. But I mean we went to the shows. Every night a show was given we went to the three nights.

MN: And these were shows at Morris?

DM: Right.

NL: And people were competing for prizes?

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DM: No - -

NL: Or just show casing their talent?

DM: Just show casing - - the singing, dancing, they had bands - -

NL: And all the people that participated were they students or were they from the community too?

DM: Students.

NL: And they were all involved in the music program at Morris. Who were the music teachers that you can think of?

DM: I don't have a clue. It was like it wasn't in the realm because I probably never listened to the music teachers.

MN: What was the reputation of Morris when you went there?

DM: It was bad.

MN: Was that the school that you wanted to go to?

DM: No. I don't think I really knew what I wanted to do, but what happened was they introduced this honors school and because of the honors school, it was kind of pulling some of the students from around the city with higher reading levels, and they presented this - -

MN: So this was in the early 60's that they created an honors school?

DM: Because I graduated Morris in '64, so I was there from '61-'64 and there was this honors school - -

[BREAK IN TAPE]

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MN: - - were in Salsa and were in Mambo, because the early part was Mambo. Did you ever hear Tito Puente?

DM: I heard him in person at the International, I saw him more than once.

MN: You saw Tito Puente in person more than once?

DM: And Mongo Santamaria.

NL: Really?

DM: And I was 13, borrowing my sister Valerie's dresses and going to these clubs because I was tall and I could get in.

MN: So they didn't have youth sections, you could just go in as an adult? You just walked in?

NL: Well you were tall enough that you could just pass - -

MN: What was it like to hear Tito Puente in person?

DM: Phenomenal. I can hear the timbales in my head at this moment. I can't tell you - - listening to you talk about it brought back so many memories, so here you were saying when they would come to these clubs on the weekends and they were just working out. So this club which we called the international, which I think was the Tropicana, was in the afternoon, so you figure I went to church in the morning, came home had breakfast, lunch, changed my clothes and whatever, and went to the International from - - because it was safe - - from 3:00 to 8:00 and danced.

MN: On Sunday afternoons from 3-8? And you heard Tito Puente - -

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DM: I heard Barry Rodgers in person. The trombonist - - all of this - - I was so excited listening to you - -

MN: And Mongo Santamaria - -

DM: So the big thing was to hear Mongo and Puente at the same place, and I did at the Hunts Point Palace. And the Rodriguez - - Pete Rodriguez - - and the Eddie Palmieri - -

MN: And Charlie Palmieri.

DM: I heard all of them for maybe \$2 on a Sunday afternoon. There was some drinking because we were adolescents but the thrust of it was to dance. And I was not the best, best dancer so I wasn't the popular girl in the middle getting - - but I mean there was enough dancing to be really happy with it.

NL: And who was in attendance at these things? It was just the whole neighborhood basically? So a lot of the white residents would go?

DM: I didn't really see a lot of white. At this time, it was '62 - - you didn't really see a lot. There were pockets.

NL: But they never went to these clubs - -

MN: Did you see African Americans coming - -

DM: There were a few, but they were doing their thing on Prospect Avenue.

MN: Right, so the Blue Morocco and all that.

DM: Yes so I went there a couple of times.

NL: When did you start kind of getting exposed to - - was it a change in high school when you started seeing people that led to an exposure to Motown - -

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DM: I had to make a decision within myself, it was not leaving my friends behind but knowing it was broadening as I made friends with Ines and another girl who I knew from junior high school who was Caribbean and we both were at Morris High School and we met this friend Ines and the three of us were inseparable. And at that time Motown was really strong and then I moved from mostly Latin dancing to learning the hip dances of African American community.

MN: What were some of those dances that you remember the names of?

DM: The Mashed Potato, Mickey's Monkey - - we did all those. The other day I went actually into remembering Ines and I dancing on the yellow line on Prospect Avenue on 169<sup>th</sup> St.

MN: On the yellow line? In the middle of the street?

DM: In the middle of the street we were dancing. It was a Saturday night who knows - - hot weather, somebody blasting music and I would walk from Simpson St to Prospect Avenue and to the girl talk and then she'd walk me back to Simpson St and then I'd walk her - - we'd walk back and forth. This is outrageous I shouldn't even say it - - but they called me the Big White Lady.

[Laughter]

DM: There were a couple of guys and they would tease me when I hit 169<sup>th</sup> St and Prospect, they'd say "Here she comes, Ines friend, the big white lady!"

NL: And these were black guys.

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DM: Right. So in the Puerto Rican world I wasn't really Puerto Rican and in the black world I wasn't really black.

NL: I guess now that we're talking about the early 60's, did what was going on in the country around race politics and civil rights, did that really affect you in any way?

DM: It was kind of there, we were still probably too young to really absorb it all, and that was first for me personally. First boyfriend times, from absorption, I was getting very frightened by the drugs and seeing them come into the neighborhood.

NL: And what kind of drugs were coming in?

DM: This was no longer pot.

MN: This was heroin.

DM: This was heroin. And I was told by one of the guys on the block that by the end of this year that everybody's going to be strung out. [Crosstalk] Yes, the brightest to even the ones that were kind of slow - -

MN: So it just cut through the guys on your block?

DM: This was '63/'64. My first boyfriend, that I didn't even know was into drug culture, someone said to me that he skin popping, so then I had to find out what that was without sounding dumb, to find out that that was shooting heroin into your skin and he did become a drug addict and ultimately, many years later, did die from an over dose.

MN: Now you mentioned that he was an alter boy from St. Andrew's?

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DM: Yes. And his - - do I name names, is that all right? His nick name was Churchy because he went to church regularly, but still, that couldn't save him from the heroin either.

MN: Now what do you think was - - what made this drug so powerful and popular with the guys at that point?

DM: I don't know. Looking back, I think it was also a way to undermine the cohesive groups. We had clubs, they were calling them social clubs, they weren't even - - the gang thing had kind of come in but it wasn't that strong. The gang thing had kind of - - there were sections. Prospect Avenue might have been the Knights, we were the Crowns. And there were divisions of the Crowns, and the girls even; we had our own little club. But we were calling them social clubs and they had parties on Saturdays and there were dances and we hung out together and yes guys would meet guys - - it was territorial, so there were fights at times. There were no guns. It was fistfights, trashcan covers, chains, but there were no guns at this time - - but I guess it was still very scary and it felt like there was an undermining in the community by the introduction of drugs. That was really the beginning of the end. I saw guys get sent to jail, guys get sent back to Puerto Rico, and then at the same time, Vietnam so there were also those starting to be drafted.

NL: Did you know a lot of people who ended up going in your neighborhood?

DM: Quite a few. And by that time we were graduating from high school so people are turning in - - there's still one guy we keep wondering whatever happened to him because we never knew, we tried to find him at the reunion and stuff. But there were some

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drafted, but some couldn't be drafted because by then the heroin prevented them from going and some went over and came back strung out.

NL: That's what I was going to ask you about.

DM: I only really know one off the top of my head that I can say that that happened to.

MN: So what did it make you feel like - - because it sounds like you grew up in a pretty safe, secure environment - - to see your block devastated?

DM: It was devastating. And at this point, the family pulled out - - the older sister, I'm the last of seven, so these older siblings saw all of this, they saw the neighborhood changing, and they pulled my mom and I out. Around this time I was the only one home.

NL: And where did you go?

DM: We ended up in the North Bronx, which was now all Jamaica and which was probably the first [Inaudible]

MN: One interesting question to me is this whole question of racial definition. How was the Jamaican construction of race different than the United States? How did your family think of itself racially, or did they?

DM: They didn't. It was hardly spoken. And I believe Valerie and I had a bonding weekend, I think I was 17 or 18 when we went to Washington D.C. together and the idea of color came up and I guess I had been struggling with it and to know I had this brown skinned sister but I also had blond and blue eyed sisters, and it just became very clear in my mind that if you're not white then you must be black.

MN: Did any of your sister's end up identifying as white?



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DM: Yes. Well, not really white. Everybody knows they're not white. But we have a strong identification with the Latin community. I have two sisters married one to a Puerto Rican, one to a Dominican. My brother married his second wife who was of German descent, and another brother married Irish. So we don't really fit into a category because we have so many off shoots.

NL: So you started, in this weekend, let's say to - - was it that you went to a place where the lines were a little more sharply drawn?

DM: So much was happening I think at the time between the civil rights movement - - in fact I think I had been introduced to the concept of the death of Kennedy in '64 which I think was extremely traumatic. I remember leaving Morris HS with these same two buddies and we walked up under the 66<sup>th</sup> and we went into St. Andrews and lit candles. And it was that awareness now - - you're watching civil rights and you're watching all that film that's coming up from the South with those dogs and all of that in Birmingham and you're watching Martin Luther King and yet I'm not feeling Martin Luther King because I couldn't turn the other cheek and not from - - I couldn't do it. I couldn't be - - I'm not from the South. I couldn't handle it; I couldn't be passive like that. Thank god I'm not there.

NL: And you used to say to your friends thank god - -

MN: You know that's interesting because growing up, I grew up in Crown Heights in a tough neighborhood, you couldn't imagine yourself being non-violent. It was so different from the street ethic of New York neighborhoods, working class neighborhoods - -

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DM: I mean you can see my whole body language - - no, I couldn't have done it and it wasn't even mature enough to even be able to appreciate it how much restraint it took. So it was kind of weird. And it wasn't until Malcolm came and I heard him and that was through the boyfriend who had gone to jail, who first introduced the whole concept of the Muslims.

MN: Is this the same boyfriend?

DM: Churchy? Yes. And so I first heard about the Muslims and that the white man is the devil and that whole concept and it was so foreign to me that I rejected it because that was absolutely ridiculous. But later on as you go through black history courses and you start listening to how Africa was underdeveloped and the slave trade and you get more and more information and realize where he was coming from with that little simple term.

NL: Did you ever hear him speak in New York?

DM: Malcolm? No. I missed that.

MN: What did your mother think of your boyfriend?

DM: She hated him. Everybody hated him. They probably saw what I just refused to see at that time.

MN: Did you bring him home, did he pick you up? OK, so it wasn't a secret thing.

DM: No. It couldn't have been. It was an infatuation, he was a basketball player.

MN: Was he a Morris HS player?

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DM: He had played ball - - did he graduate? - - I don't know but he did go to Morris.

And that was my big interest when I first got to Morris. All this was happening it was dynamic, Morris had a great basketball team; they went to Madison Square Garden.

MN: I remember that because I was from Erasmus but I was at Wingate for a year.

DM: Wingate beat us.

MN: And I remember there was a guy Nevil Shed who ended up playing at Texas Western when they won the championship with the all black team. All these teams had Bronx kids.

DM: It was a really big thing. Even somebody like Frank Perez, who was 6'5'' maybe mixed, but you look at him and basically saw African.

MN: So you looked at him and saw Boota Rican.

DM: [Laughs] Yes. He was the classic Boota Rican. There were some other names; I'll have to try to remember them.

NL: Did you see a lot of people being influenced by Black Power during your middle late teens - -

DM: At this point I'd moved away. So we went up to the Northeast Bronx and I was a graduate and I was working in a telephone company and I was experiencing the freedom of work.

NL: How did you end up getting your job at the telephone company?

DM: Through Ines.

MN: So Ines didn't go to college?

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DM: She went to St. Claire's Hospital Nursing School and it was a two year school. She went the year before I did; I went to a three year nursing school so she was a nurse two years before I even finished.

MN: OK because here you're both in this honors school, why weren't you encouraged to go to a four year college?

DM: Actually, I did enroll; you have to turn the tape off please.

[BREAK]

MN: What made you choose nursing as a career at that time?

DM: I have a sister that's a nurse – saw her today at my school, she came to visit. She's ten years older than I, so I was all of 8 and she was 18 as a nursing school student – she'd bring home these stories from Bellevue Hospital. I heard of really the tough times she'd had as a nursing school student. By the time I'd got there, it had eased up a little.

MN: So these were stories of - -

DM: Of nursing, being a nursing school student, and then because of that critical period in my life, she said to me if you want to be independent, one of the best things you can do for yourself is to become a nurse.

NL: Were many African American women being funneled into the nursing field at that time or - -

DM: No. The joke with my nursing school buddies was here we go again - - there were 6.5 blacks and a 180 women - -

NL: And you were the half black? OK.

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MN: Now there had been a school in the Bronx called Lincoln School for Nurses.

DM: I think it just closed, and the one in Harlem – that would have been too black for my cultural background, and then I also tried Kings County and that was kind of far, Brooklyn was another world.

NL: Growing up in the Bronx in the 80's Brooklyn was still another world, we went up there once a year for the parade and that was it. [Laughs] I wanted to ask you about your experience in the Northeast Bronx. Where did you and your mom move to at that point? Do you remember what street you lived on?

DM: Yes. I lived on 221<sup>st</sup> St right off Bronxwood Avenue. It was an apartment building on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor, and I was trying as I was writing this list to remember how long we were there. Because I was definitely there in nursing school in the early years, but then I guess as my mother was getting older, Parkchester opened up, civil rights housing laws changed and Parkchester had been strictly Jewish and Irish, had to accept - - yes - - and my mother had an apartment there and she was older. It was an elevated building as opposed to a 5<sup>th</sup> floor walk up on 221<sup>st</sup> St.

MN: Was the neighborhood on 221<sup>st</sup> a racially mixed neighborhood at that time?

DM: I would say predominately black middle class.

NL: And these were blacks who had been in the Bronx for years and moved from other places?

DM: Possibly, some straight from Jamaica, some from - -

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MN: So the neighborhood had a Caribbean flavor at that time? And this was like

'66/'67?

DM: This was right after immigration laws changed - - there was this whole huge influx.

NL: How did you see the relationship working out between the African Americans who had been in the Bronx and the new arrival of Caribbean immigrants?

DM: I always felt that there was animosity.

NL: Really?

DM: And there was always an arrogance from the Jamaicans.

NL: From the new Jamaicans?

DM: And even the old Jamaicans. There was an arrogance of their superiority over African Americans.

NL: What were the origins of that, what do you think?

DM: The same I would say that happens now – how there are biases negatively towards African Americans as being lazy, shiftless, who don't know the history, who don't understand the struggle and can see what has already been overcome. They just hear the negative and the same thing happens to immigrants today. And it took me many, many years and African American history courses to kind of reflect and think about it and I came up with a feeling of a distinctive thing and coming from a landmass and calling it your home, that is to give you a sense of belonging that African Americans do not have. That is my theory.

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NL: That is very interesting that you would say that. That even with a family such as yours that didn't go back - - your father being a person who much more identified with Jamaica passed away at an early stage but you still got that sense of knowing that you're different from African American. Did your mom ever articulate that or was it something you just knew?

DM: It was something I knew. She didn't articulate too much. She was brief in her statements. She may have said a few prejudicial, biased things - - but nothing outrageous.

NL: Nothing too deviant from the norm of what was understood, to be the difference between African Americans and West Indians of all kinds.

MN: Did you attend a church in the North Bronx when you moved to that section?

DM: No, I was rebelling. I wasn't going to church. My mother still went and when we moved to Parkchester she started going to St. Andrews on Castle Hill Avenue.

MN: The same St. Andrews that - -

DM: Right, well it's a different St. Andrews now, but it was - - St. Andrews Episcopal. The St. Andrews there at Prospect was a Catholic church.

MN: OK so the one your friend Churchy was - - St. Anthony of Padua. OK he was a choirboy at St. Anthony of Padua.

DM: I went to - - did Valerie talk to you about our relationship in our family member house?

NL: Oh Colin Powell is your cousin.

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DM: Right. So I went to see his aunt's wake two years ago with my sister Jean who this was her godmother, Colin Powell's aunt. And we get to the church and there's all these secret service people, we're like laughing at the two of us, we were the two youngest - - and we're laughing about the secret service women and wondering if they're going to stop us and we get to the church and we sit down and we see him up front and we'll go - - so they'll know we're here. But at some point, I realized that this was Churchy's church. And it hadn't hit me, it was that same thing with - -

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

MN: - - hang out with Powell's family when you were growing up?

DM: My mother was close to his father, they were cousins and I remember visiting.

MN: They lived on Kelly St.

DM: Yes. And then they moved when Uncle hit the number and they got a house in Queens. And I remember this trek to Queens and their house - -

NL: Where in Queens was it?

DM: I have no idea. I remember the picture being taken when there was this whole crowd of family on the couch and everyone's sleeping or leaned over - - so I was then probably nine or ten. But my real memory of him was at my sisters wedding, my older sister's wedding, so I was a really little girl and he must have just been a very handsome young guy - - but other than that - - and I've had a couple of little emails here and there. But my mother was close - - his father helped my mother a lot. There was a lot of prejudice and looking down on my mother because she had these seven kids. So she was



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kind of like well, why'd she have all those kids? And when my father passed there was a struggle, I remember Uncle Luther who helped - -

MN: His name was Luther, Uncle Luther? OK. Now when you moved up to Bronxwood Avenue and then to Parkchester, did you ever go back to visit Simpson St?

DM: Yes.

MN: And what was that like?

DM: It's traumatic. My building's gone. The stoop which looked enormous is a itty bitty little thing now about the size of this table. And this is where we all congregated and it was all of this information and my sister Gene and I used to stand and call ourselves the lions - - you know the lions of the library and we were the lions of the stoop - - and we looked for everybody and my building was the focus of communication.

MN: What was the number?

DM: 1098 Simpson St. It's no longer there. And we were three buildings down from the 41<sup>st</sup> Precinct, which is Fort Apache. And I spent a lot of summers running into the 41<sup>st</sup> Precinct as a little girl because it was cool and we would go down just to walk in the precinct past the big desk, with all the policemen there.

NL: And you were allowed to walk in freely.

DM: We were allowed to walk in and we went downstairs - -

NL: Did you have a good - - did the community have a good relationship with the police?

DM: Until I was about 11 and I found out they were the enemy.

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MN: Really? So there was this moment where there was a sort of - - what was the sense of them as the enemy and who told you that?

DM: Well here's what happened exactly. I was about 11 years old and we were in the school yard. A little white girl had been picked on by some kids and her pinafore or something had been pulled on and pulled down and they were looking for the people who raped her. So now the 41<sup>st</sup> Precinct was like my backyard, my home, and I don't remember why but we were walking the police wall surrounding the building - - and we used to do this just because it was there, it was a challenge, it was something to do in the summer; climb the most trees or whatever - - but as you walked around it got deeper and deeper and the challenge was to walk this wall. So I walked this wall and on the way back I saw everybody running and I didn't quite know what was going and a big tall policeman took me in the precinct and of course, I was this tall already, because I was eleven and I was growing fast and I knew already that something big had happened. And he started yelling and I was in the interrogation room - - and I instinctively lied to him. I told him my name was Carmen Rivera and that I lived at 933 Tiffany St apartment whatever, phone number is da da da - - made it up just like that, it just came pouring out just like that. At one point he said I'm going to call your mother and he went to stand up and I went to touch him and he said "Get your piece of shit hands," or something like that "off of me." And it was such a horrible feeling because up until then, they had always been my friend the policemen.

NL: So they were targeting the Latino kids on that block to find out what had happened.

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DM: Well, we were the kids from the neighborhood so I was just picked up because I was in the right spot at the right time - - so I leave the precinct and I don't remember why he was letting me go, but there was a crowd outside already, some of the kids had heard that "Da - pha - ne's" - - they could never say my name right - - Da-pha-ne's in the precinct. So I came out and I had this tough air that you already knew you had to have - - and I walked by everyone else like I'm fine. And after I got past outside and to the apartment building and burst into tears and went in and told my mother and she said "Oh stop it, that's silliness." She didn't even think anything of it or that she should have been outraged that I was pulled into the precinct.

MN: It's interesting that tough - - that's another thing I remember from those days. There was a way you had to walk in certain - - into school, down the street. You still end up having it, it's still there - - I can still do it.

DM: On trains people say don't look at anyone in the train - - I look at every single person in that train station and I'm going to look at you, and I'm going to see who's around me - - I'm not going to put my eyes down, I'm going to look.

MN: Can you give someone the evil eye, can you stare them down?

DM: Oh ask my students. [Laughter] They used to say "Don't look at me like that!"

[Laughter]

MN: My wife when she first met me said "How'd you learn to stare like that?" But it was all the theatre of the streets you learn.

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DM: So that was my recognition - - and then after that the police - - soon after that there were a couple of incidents with the guys from block and I remember - -

NL: It kind of coincided with the drugs coming into the block - -

DM: Yes I remember. And you know the jokes made about it, stories with my brother in law. You know, "What's your name?" "Louder!" "What's your name?" And we kept having to say his name "Louder!" And "Louder! For the policemen."

MN: So was there a point where you saw them systematically publicly humiliate the guys on the block, or it wasn't that - -

DM: I think we were gone.

NL: But you knew that's what you were leaving behind?

DM: Yes. And then I had moved to an older group. I had moved to the Northeast Bronx and met future husband. And I was with older people.

MN: Was he from the Caribbean?

DM: No, he was from the South.

NL: Oh OK. Where in the South was he from?

DM: His mother was from Georgia - - in fact ran out of the Georgia, was his famous story, because she shot out a white man and she had to leave town. And so, he grew up in Cleveland and then lived very close to me in the South Bronx before we met in '67.

NL: And what did he do for a living?

DM: At that time, he was married and had a few kids. And we met and we were dating, and I was like you know, you're a married man, I can't see you. And eventually we got

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together when he separated. But he was a man of many traits, master of none. What is it Jack of all trades? So he sang, he was a singer on the side, he was a dancer - - he could do the James Brown split and all that stuff - - as well as - -

NL: Did he do any professional - -

DM: A little bit with a friend of his, but that was on the side. He also did superintendent work, he worked in the Wall Street area as a handy man. Superintendent of a multi building - - he was just - -

NL: In the Northeast Bronx he was a super?

DM: No, this was Manhattan.

NL: Oh, OK.

MN: You met him in Manhattan?

DM: I met him in the Northeast Bronx but he worked in Manhattan. He had a few jobs. But I would say he introduced me to the other social life. The last of Harlem, I caught the last of the Great Harlem - -

NL: Where did you go?

DM: Where you could go into a club for a couple of drinks and see live music and sit and dance and appreciate and so - -

NL: Do you remember any of the names of the clubs you went to?

MN: Did you ever go to Smalls Paradise?

DM: We went to Smalls - -

MN: I used to go there.

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DM: - - I went to the place with the waffles, chicken waffles, Wells. There were a couple of little clubs 145<sup>th</sup> St where you went for music.

NL: Is this the place that Maxine - -

DM: Maybe. And I was just happy; I mean he took me to the village.

MN: Was he older than you?

DM: Yes, nine years older. So I heard Miriam Malecha live at the village gate.

MN: I might have been there - -

DM: Yes, you might of. [Laughter]

MN: This sounds like all the places - - I was in Harlem - - I was always going to Smalls Paradise.

DM: Smalls was nice.

NL: Do you know the places where he played?

DM: Well, he had a good friend who had a band, so he could just walk in and they would say such and such is here and he would sing a song- -

NL: Oh OK so it would be kind of impromptu. Where did the two of you live after you got married? Did you stay in the Northeast Bronx?

DM: No. OK - - so we went to - -

NL: What year was this?

DM: '69 I left nursing school, by '71 we were together and I was living in another part of the Bronx, where Valerie is now. Jamie Towers. After we had become serious because he had been married and it was a kind of heavy - - I wanted some freedom

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because I was a graduate so I was dating a little. And we got serious in '71 and he moved in with me and actually we got divorced in '75 when my first son was born. But you know - - party man.

MN: What were some of the places that you went to in the Bronx?

DM: Not too much then. Well, I was living Uptown, there was a place that had just opened up across the street when I was living in the Northeast Bronx called Blue-something. It was right on Bronxville Avenue and so we hung out there and there were a few clubs at 233<sup>rd</sup> St and I don't remember their names - -

NL: What music did those clubs play?

DM: Strictly Motown then. Aretha Franklin and all of that was going on.

NL: And it was mostly African Americans who went to these clubs?

DM: Yes.

MN: So by this time your social life was mostly in an African American - -

DM: Absolutely.

NL: And did you know of any kind of venues that were strictly for the Caribbean people in your neighborhood?

DM: Yes, but they were Caribbean, I wasn't with the - - and when they did they didn't believe I was Caribbean either. So actually - - what I felt most comfortable with was an acceptance for African Americans because they really just didn't - - everyone is accepted in their culture.

NL: Right because they come in all shades and colors pretty much.

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MN: Right, I was adopted by an African American family in the late 60's and that's who I was going to Smalls with.

DM: It's an overwhelming experience trying even to remember as you're asking me questions. And it's just a whole feeling of my gosh, it's just so much.

MN: And what about the food? What did you grow up with in your house?

DM: My mother cooked American - - actually, there were Jamaican dishes that we still knew that were hers that she learned, but as a domestic she had to learn how to cook American. So our meals were very balanced and very domestic. I remember things like spaghetti on Fridays, which she never ate, pot roast on Sundays - - we had balance.

Lamb chops one day - - she managed to do all of this, leg of lamb turkey, we knew all of these things - - but then integrated with rice and peas, which I still can't find anybody to do right. You know, black eyed peas - - they do red beans and I like my rice and peas with black eyed peas.

MN: At your Puerto Rican friend's house, what did you eat there?

DM: At my friends, everything. My friend Ebby, the one who's son is in Iraq, her mother would cook huge pots of food, so I would eat at my house and we would hang out all evening and by 11:00 at night the pots were still on the stove and there was yellow rice and beans and you had red meat, which is the roast pork - - so much so, I told the story of Castle Avenue recently, of walking into a restaurant, it was a Vietnamese restaurant, it closed down, and I went in to buy some fast food for my son, and I walked



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in and I said this is Ebby's mother's cooking. And the best friend is still there, the guy

has made a phenomenal amount of money - -

MN: What is it called?

DM: Brisas.

MN: I have to write this down.

DM: On Castle Hill Avenue. He burned down, he got a larger store. He has another one

but I don't like it as much. It's Castle Hill, about four blocks in from the L - - on the

right hand side of the -

NL: Going towards the Cross Bronx you're talking about?

DM: Yes.

MN: So it's on the north side of the Bruckner?

DM: I have no sense of direction.

MN: OK but it's not on your side.

DM: Right. [Crosstalk]

NL: Yes, I grew up in Jamie Towers too. My mom - -

DM: Did you know my son?

NL: I knew Kerri growing up, I didn't know - -

DM: Oh you knew Raheim.

NL: I probably knew your sons by face. Yes. I definitely remember the name.

DM: I had another son Jared and a step son Shaheim.

NL: Yes, I do know their names.

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MN: OK so you had mostly American, but some Jamaican, exposure to the Puerto Rican  
- - lot of Puerto Rican.

DM: And then the African American.

MN: Did your husband cook soul food?

DM: Taught me how. Taught me how to cook Caribbean, my mother was very bad. She  
said "Go do your homework."

MN: So what were some of the things that you learned to cook?

DM: Almost everything that I've learned to cook has been through him. Well, I could  
do collard greens if I have to, but it's not my favorite thing.

MN: With neck bones or without?

DM: Yes and I've used neck bones - - I've learned how to use different pieces from neck  
bones to smoke turkey instead and fried chicken - - everything.

MN: Can you do potato salad?

DM: I make the best potato salad but that comes from my mother.

MN: With a lot of eggs?

DM: Enough eggs but not a lot. But I make a good potato salad - - the last time I made it  
was Easter Sunday. And they raved!

NL: So in Jamie Towers, was it easy for you to get in - - I knew it was around the  
Mitchell Lama - -

DM: It was easy because I had vowed. I went in single in '71 and I bought a small - -  
one bedroom.

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NL: What building were you in?

DM: Building one. And I was there a couple of years until he moved in with me, and eventually we got a divorce and I had my son and all of that stuff. And we became supers because again, he had all this history of being a handy man and he knew how to do all this and he was a people person. So he was an assistant super and we became supers because this way I could stop working and there was enough income and we were able to make it. And I went back to school, I got my bachelors.

MN: And this was at Fordham?

DM: Yes.

MN: And this was at Downtown or Uptown?

DM: Lincoln.

MN: And this was in the evening or regular session?

DM: Regular day session.

MN: So you went back to Fordham downtown.

DM: Got my bachelors.

NL: And this is when you were living - - you moved from Jamie Towers to - -

DM: No, we were still living there.

NL: But he was a super at other buildings?

DM: No, that building.

NL: Oh! He was a super at that building. Oh, OK wow.

MN: What was his name?

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DM: Zetra Johnson.

MN: Zetra.

DM: Unusual name.

MN: Now when you were going to get your bachelors was that something that meant you wanted to get out of nursing or not necessarily?

DM: I knew that it was part of the future. When I left nursing school they told us that a bachelor's degree was going to be essential. I didn't have the money to go to college so that wasn't an option for me. So the very first year that I left Bellevue in June '69 - - that September I registered at Hunter College and met my professor Dr. Rodriguez-Abad who taught me about Vietnam and South Africa. Basically the entire history of South Africa no one knew what I was talking about. And that was my real introduction to activism.

MN: What organizations did you get involved with in those years?

DM: Really not any, but I remember signing a zillion petitions against the war. I just knew they were going to come and get me one day. Because my name - - I was living in Manhattan so you'd walk up three blocks and someone was there with the table and the petition and the peace thing and you're involved. We went to Hunter - -

NL: And this was what year?

DM: This was fall of '69. Columbia College was having the kids hanging from outside -  
-

MN: That was me.

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DM: And I walked into Hunter and there was this immense rally going on with pig heads on sticks and I can remember I had on red, white, and blue pinstripe bellbottoms jeans and a little top and oh I was drop dead fine and all this stuff - - and I walked in and I had heard that the rally was against the firing of Dr. Rodriguez-Abad and I couldn't believe he was going to be fired after he opened up my whole world to this whole other thing and joined the rally and they marched into the presidents office with carpeting like this in this huge room and you could just walk down and sit down and I just sat there. And I said to myself "What the hell are you doing here? You just got your state board license as a registered professional nurse and you better get out of here." And so, I just got up and left because the police came and I would lose my license.

NL: And you just went through hell to get it.

DM: Right. I would say he awakened so much of me and then I was able to take classes with John Henrike Clark and that was great. And I eventually met the other one.

MN: Dr. Ben?

DM: Dr. Ben. Took classes with Dr. Ben and became very sensitive to the whole [Inaudible] of the whole African relation and the whole world opened up.

NL: And this was now - -

MN: Early 70's.

DM: And I took a class on Malcolm X. That guy did a study on his speeches and his rhetoric and how he spoke and how he was able to speak and empower the crowd and make them laugh at their own weaknesses and yet bring them forth to another state of - -

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NL: Did it make you reflect being on your whole entire experience growing up?

DM: I was able to identify with red Malcolm. He didn't quite - - he was red and here I was I and I didn't really - - and I fit. And John Henrik Clark helped me to accept my whole identity and that as an African, Africans take in everyone. And he took me so openly and gave me an assignment to do the east African slave trade, which there was no information on so I struggled and he said do you know the slave trade? And he made me build this paper from the slave trade in the east. So that was a challenge and it helped me form my own identity and get comfortable with myself.

NL: What was your major at Fordham then?

DM: Social Services. I had my major, I was just taking classes.

NL: You had just taken a bunch of classes once you had left Morris - -

MN: Are there any teachers you remember from Fordham?

DM: An economics teacher, and I had a couple of African American history teachers but I'm not good with names - - so no. But it was a very good experience as a young child and everybody was very young in the classroom when you're 30 and they're 18. But they called me down and they said "You x amount of credits from Hunter and you have x amount of credits from here, what's going to be your major?" And they pointed out Social Sciences which is what I did with a minor in Finance.

MN: Right, then you got a masters degree?

DM: Later on I got a Masters in health education because to try to put the two together which was a waste of time.

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MN: So was your goal to eventually go into the school system and teach science and health education?

DM: No. [Laughs]

MN: So how did that happen?

DM: 19 - - I was working as a nurse actually and my sister Valerie said to me "Why don't you take the test to teach nursing?" And I did, only the problem was when I passed the test I didn't have a bachelors. Now I work in a [Inaudible] area. There are several professions traits where men do not have to have degrees. But for nursing and business, women have to have degrees. So I was not able to do it at that time. I went back and did it again once I got the degree I passed the test and they begged me to come in 1980 when my son was born. I got a call from a principal who said I understand you have passed the nursing exam to teach nursing. I need you as of yesterday.

MN: Which school was this?

DM: This was Benjamin Franklin. I went into Benjamin Franklin in East Harlem. And then having been away from the mixture of the African American and Latino community, got smacked with it again. I saw the kids and how they interacted with each other and the blending of the two cultures, and I was amazed.

NL: In the 80's now, this is early hip hop - - a whole other generation.

MN: Were you aware of hip hop?

DM: Oh yes, my step son was writing hip hop sitting on my couch every day.

MN: How old was he?

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DM: OK he is now 38 so in 1980 he was 17.

MN: Because you mentioned here disco.

DM: My husband was a disco person.

MN: OK now when is your first awareness of hip hop?

DM: Through my step son, he was writing hip hop. He's an original from the original writers. You can trace hip hop back to the North Bronx, that area - - this project - -

MN: Bronx River?

DM: No it was north of that and I'm blocking out the name - -

MN: Edenwald?

DM: Edenwald.

MN: OK so he was the first group of Edenwald - -

DM: He was an Edenwald writer.

MN: And what was his name?

DM: His current name - - he's in that picture where they did all of the hip hop - - his name is Shaheim Johnson and you can speak with him if - -

MN: Yes we may want to interview him about - -

DM: Oh yes. He would love it - - He has his fathers' personality

MN: Is he still in the Bronx?

DM: He lives in Manhattan now.

NL: Where did he go to high school?

DM: When we could get him to go to school he went to Truman.



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NL: Oh OK that would make sense.

DM: He was supposed to be doing music even this year; he was supposed to be going over seas.

MN: OK so he's still - - does he write lyrics? Does he do beats or just the lyrics?

DM: Well I guess the lyrics to the beats.

MN: Did you ever go to any live events at which he preformed?

DM: Not that he preformed no.

NL: But you went to other live events?

DM: They were very - - well there's two step children and my daughter and I are disenfranchised whatever the word is you know what I'm trying to say since their father died, since he died - - separated. But he and I are still kind of close, and I never really did. But I've been aware, I've heard his music, he's had me listen to things. I can remember long legal pads just filled with lyrics.

MN: Now what about the kids at Franklin, were they into hip hop in the early 80's?

DM: When you say early 80's Franklin I think of that song [Sings] "Heart beat - - you make me feel - - " [Laughter]

NL: OK yes.

DM: Because I was teaching nursing so to the kids I would teach "heart beat - - " [Laughs] motivationally.

MN: Who preformed that?

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NL: That's actually a woman. I think it's an R&B song - - because my father has this album in his house. My father used to own a club at one point and he had all these records at one point. The club was kind of close to where he used to live in the North Bronx.

DM: Do you know the name of the club?

NL: The club was called Quarter Moon Social Club at one point and it was also called the Uptown Playhouse.

MN: Uptown Playhouse had some hip hop stuff because I've seen ads for that in *Yes Yes Y'all*.

NL: I don't know if that's the same club because he told me he didn't renew his lease because the people who owned it wanted to turn it into a church. So it's somehow a store front church somewhere along - -

DM: Oh OK I know where that is.

NL: Really? You're kidding me.

DM: Yes but at this time I was child rearing so I had little kids and I was not hanging out. But I think I know because there was one there on White Plains Road there, a nice little club - -

NL: Yes it had a spiral stair case inside. You knew it? That was my father's club! That was the place where all Antiguans went when they came to the United States. Well anyway, I just remember Tana Gardener is her name. Because I tried to imagine the album, he had so many albums.

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DM: When you play that song - - that classic hip hop song - -

MN: Rappers Delight?

DM: Yes.

[Sing song]

DM: That I remember is really the onset.

NL: So they were then just really getting into - -

DM: I mean then they weren't wearing any shoe laces, what was the thing?

MN: Adidas?

NL: Did you see a lot of graffiti writing and stuff?

DM: Not in my school - - but they closed that school, ended up leaving that school. It was really well kept. The custodian wouldn't have it. If you wrote on that wall, you cleaned it.

MN: So you were teaching nursing, were you doing any nursing on the side?

DM: No, not then. Jared was an infant when I went in.

MN: How did you move into administration?

DM: Not until '95. So Franklin closed and was reorganized into a three-tier building and I went to the North Bronx and I went to Evander and I was living on Fenton Avenue and Boston Rd. We had left Jamie Towers by this time, my husband and I - - we were in a 6 room apartment on Boston Rd, great apartment, right on the corner. But our marriage went down hill; we were going through a lot of stuff. And he was living with Gabby so we were very stressful. I had a great mentor who was African American - - the most

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professional person I have ever been around and she really taught me how to teach and I kept her program going.

NL: So she taught at the nursing program first and then you took it over from there.

What was this woman's name?

DM: Renida Corum. She's still alive, church going woman, goes to church in Harlem.

There's a person you may want to contact, her name is Valerie Board, from Prospect Avenue in the Bronx who also lived two doors away from Ines Robinson from California. Addy Venda, she's Valerie Vallard now.

NL: She still teaches there?

DM: She retired as a principal. She was a guidance counselor, she lived in the Northeast Bronx and she comes from Prospect Avenue.

MN: Now when you were teaching at Evander, were most of your students African American or were they Afro-Caribbean?

DM: Mostly African American, but because that's Spanish Harlem there a lot of kids from Spanish Harlem. The kids from the community knew it wasn't a good school so their parents sent them elsewhere and it was a lot of kids who had no where else to go. And even when I walked in the classroom, it was October '80, they said "Are you going to leave us like the other teachers did?"

MN: This was at Franklin. What about Evander?

DM: Evander, Ms. Corn ran a very tight program, I run into the students to this day. I have nurses and doctors that came out of my program and I gave it to her legacy which

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left to me. It was a self-fulfilling prophecy attitude that came into the program and your level of functioning was going to rise; and that's what she left me with. It was closed because - - and that's why I ended up in Manhattan - - that probably was then closed because the state was putting more and more demands on what you had to have to have a nursing program because it was really health careers. You taught them skills that allowed the students to explore and I have doctors and nurses, etc. And then I ended up at the school which is a Bosces model in Manhattan called School of Cooperative Technical Education and from there, it was time for change. The assistant principal was leaving and the principal said "Firstly, I would like to have a female." And I went back to school again and did 21 credits in administration in one year.

MN: And where are you now?

DM: I'm there, as an administrator. I've been there since '91.

NL: Now, to backtrack a little bit, I wanted to know what your experience was like at Evander because I'm sure you saw a lot of change. You said you were there from '82-'91 so that's a decade where the neighborhood definitely changed. What was it like in terms of the student body, what did you see?

DM: I have to say this: a big change took place after I left. So I really didn't - - I know that it's really - - it's just been broken up - -

MN: Into small schools, right.

DM: - - and it went through heck. It was really going through a tough time and it was considered horrible. When I was there it was not. I had a wonderful experience at

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Evander. The last of the academic schools; it had academic, it had many, many programs, it still had music with a total orchestra and a band and a choir, and I was so naïve to music that at one of our ceremonies for the health careers, I asked Priscilla Walker if her students that did acapella could sing, and she said certainly. These girls came down without piano or anything to sing, and I said when are you going to sing? And they said "My love for you will never die." So I'm thinking it's one of those hip hop songs or something and it's a classical song [Laughs] that you hear on the radio. And it was so professional. But Evander had - - but that was killed in the late 80's. They killed the music program and the art program just hung on by its finger tips and I think it's just coming back now and you talked about the music programs and I sat there listening to you and thought oh my god, that's so true. And that's why I went into the parks and I was having such an experience listening to your lecture. I don't know if you could see me, but I was just rattled in the audience; I was rocking and everything because I was so touched, you had put it together for me.

MN: Thank you. It's a pretty emotional experience to do this history. And also, I mean all of the things you describe; it isn't a story that's been told in the Bronx. There's the one film, Dead Presidents, which - - but there's so much more to the story and there's all the casualties.

DM: From what drugs did to the community, what service in the war did combined with that - -

MN: In the 80's did you ever go back to Simpson St then?

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DM: You know what, you did ask me that question before and I went all around in circles. I went back a few times but the last time I went, the original girlfriend that I made friends with when I was 11.5 and this tall, she gave me all my first rules with boyfriends and what to do, she was like 15 - - she's retiring now, she's a principal in California - - she was my connection to the rest of the school and her family moved to California. And so she came back - - we connected through - - there was a reunion and one of the guys from the block called - - and her brother lived in California - - called someone and I said "You were in touch with Johnny Gonzalez?" And I talked to him and he said "My sister Melba" - - and so I talked to Melba, Melba comes to New York, we go to Simpson St, I probably could dig out the pictures. And we took pictures at the foot of the train station, we walked around, we looked at Simpson, and what used to look so huge was now this tiny little area where I could stand on the corner and see Morris High School up the hill [Laughs]. And it was tough. It was a good emotion, but a very emotional experience to relive and just walk the streets. Of course, when Carter built Carter Houses, it changed the face of the neighborhood a lot, so yes I did go back. And since then I've gone back once or twice. My brother came in from Florida and I think he went. You'd drive down the street that used to look huge and that you'd roller skate down and you'd see this little narrow block it's a stone throw. So yes, I've been back. I'll call it Little House on the Prairie, the 41<sup>st</sup> Precinct. So it's a lot, I've know I've rattled around - - I hope you can get something out of this.

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MN: One question: when you were having these house parties, the grind 'em up parties, where were the parents, were they there?

DM: Usually in the kitchen, or sometimes my guess is that they had left and the kids decided to give a party. There's linoleum floors and they were tenement parties, a couple of times there were waist line parties, where they charged you a small fee according to your waist line. Things like that - - there were six and seven parties sometimes, I forget - - with this girl Melba Gonzalez and we would get all of these addresses and we would make the rounds to all of these parties. We must have left at 7 because I had to be home at midnight, so I was young. When Melba left it was very difficult transitioning in with the other girls and that's when they started doing the Sunday bakes. So it was easier to go out for a few hours in the evening on Saturday and do this Sunday gig where you could just dance all afternoon. That was marvelous.

MN: To see Tito Puente and Mongo Santa Maria live - -

DM: And Paco, there was Paco and all of these great - - and they would bring bands. Music and trumpets and people - -

MN: Well the trumpets yes. Were there ever Puerto Rican men who would play the congas on the street?

DM: My brother in-law and his brother. Lefty Bermudez is someone I could put you in contact with. He was not only the best dancer in the neighborhood - - my sister Gene married John Bermudez and her brother in law is Lefty Bermudez and he was one of the few of the social guys where he could dance, he could sing, he could play congas - - we



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would leave parties and of course I was with big sister, I could go to their house and they would play congas in the evening. Some were at night on the rooftop.

MN: You could hear the congas?

DM: Oh yes.

MN: Because this something - - it's so interesting - - the people who were at the Patterson Houses who were African American remember moving there and remember moving there and then hearing the Puerto Rican men playing the congas in the little park. It was the first time they had ever heard drums and it was such a powerful experience.

DM: Boat rides, that was another thing. We went to these social boat rides and bands would play also.

NL: And where would the boat ride leave from?

DM: To Bear Mountain [Crosstalk] I guess one of the piers - -

MN: The pier was on 42<sup>nd</sup> St and the cruise to Bear Mountain - - and did you go to picnics up there?

DM: Yes. And be out all day and come back on the boat - - we threw big parties.

MN: Yes there was this whole scene. Now, this is a question because we interviewed Pete DJ Jones, did you ever go to any of his parties in the West Bronx?

DM: I have no idea. [Laughs]

MN: They're up in High Bridge.

DM: No.

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MN: OK. This is interesting; we were in some of the same places in those years - -

Smalls, the Bear Mountain, and those cruises - - oh my god.

DM: Any given social club - - well lets say, your mother's church was giving a troop, then you and your friends just went. And we went on quite a few. Sometimes the music didn't show up so the guys made music. So you had the timbales, somebody had congas, somebody took a guido and started playing and used the poles that you had to stand it on to hold it - - they would use that and start making music. And so, we started dancing around the boat.

NL: And Tigas would call that an iron band.

DM: [Laughs] There you go. So living this, this was a good experience going through this. I did tell you that have a few other people, there are others - - I don't know how many you want to do but at some point - -

MN: Well, we're not going away for a while.

NL: Yes this is an on going project.

MN: For a long time.

NL: We'll definitely contact you and if you want to stay in touch with us, email us names, phone numbers - -

MN: Do you want to keep this on or - -

[BREAK]

NL: - - Well, it's kind of random but because a lot of educators have come here and talked about the kind of difficulty that they experienced over the 70's and 80's with the

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change in the public school system in the Bronx, and kind of the changing of the guard so to speak. Things that came out of the '68 teachers strike and everything that happened after; what were your experiences in the 80's with the aftermath of all that?

DM: I walked right in. Here I was, home with a five month old baby, and I had taken that test and the principal called and said I need a teacher as of yesterday, when can you come? And I had to arrange for a baby sitter and I walked in October 8, 1980, started teaching. I was given some support, they weren't critical and they let me do whatever I want.

NL: Were the parent able to - -

DM: There were no parents at that high school at all. But I learned a lot and I met this fabulous group of African American nurses who were nursing teachers and they propped me up. They supported me, they gave me the ideas, and there were meetings every month and I would look forward to these meetings down at Baltic St.

NL: This was just an informal group of you guys?

DM: The - -

MN: What was the name of the group?

DM: It was the Health Careers Programs which was separate from the license of practical nursing which is kind of a level above us, but we had in that health careers program was several African American and a few white Americans but it was a cohesive group. We worked together; we did a celebration at the end of the year where we brought all the kids together. So those first few years I felt very supported. At Evander then my

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mentor just took me to another level and when she eventually retired, turned the program over to me. At this point I was invisible at Evander; no one thought that I would be able to carry her program. She was so well loved - - she was part of that '67 strike, she had earned her respect, she was from one of the first Bachelor of Nursing programs in the United States, Florida A&M or one of those. So she had all of that real southern type, she was a together lady. And when she retired, for the first year hardly anyone even looked at me. I gave the retirement party with Valerie Velard's help and it put me on the map. I gained all the respect from everyone at Evander, my program was loved, and I kept it going really well until they started really making changes. So I leave there and I go to this new school and all I hear is "Oh, we've been hearing about your coming for a long time, everybody's been looking forward to it," because I was introducing females into an all male population at the Bosces model of tech. So I bring in nursing students for the first time, they didn't even have a sink in the room and I said to the principal "You can't teach nursing without a sink."

NL: So this was an all male's school?

DM: Just about.

NL: And you were the first to integrate - -

DM: And so I'm bringing in females and they built a sink, so they took two desks, two faucets - - because I mean this is a construction school - - so they put a sink in the room and I developed a program. The changes started coming and I think the next change is going to be even bigger with the Department of Education and they're trying to eliminate

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that middle tier of the assistant principals, there's going to be changes. And I think that's going to be really difficult. Although the Department of Education was supposed to change dramatically and eliminate 110<sup>th</sup> Livingston St but now you have six principals in one building - - we're paying six principal's salaries as opposed to one. What have they eliminated? So I've had it easy. In '95 my mother had just passed from a long term illness, had been going down for years. And I was out of the school and another gentleman decided he was going to retire and they called me and said "Would you consider being assistant principal?" So I've had a fortunate experience, right place right time. When they got me, and I'm very practical about this, not only did get a female, they got a nurse who can speak a little Spanish who looks between a mix of it could be black, Hispanic, Jewish, Italian - - so I mean they got a bargain.

NL: So your story was kind of the exception?

DM: I think so; I think I've been lucky. And so now the occupations career program network was eliminated - - so there is no network. Where I have nursing teachers I could reach out to, that's gone.

NL: Did your kids go to public schools too?

DM: Yes. Both of my children went to public school, they went to PS 78 and we lived in the Northeast Bronx. And then PS 71 when we moved - - lets see - - and then Jared, my younger one, has a minimal reading problem but enough for me to be a little leery about putting him in high school. He went to a very small junior HS, Bankstreet Model -

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Interviewers: Natasha Lightfoot and Dr. Mark Naison

Interviewee: Daphne Moss

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[END OF INTERVIEW]

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