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Bronx African American History Project
Fordham University

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Transcriber: Ryan Duffy

Mark Naison (MN): Hello, this is the 171st interview of the Bronx African American History Project. We're at Fordham University at May 31st 2006, and we're here with Tony Martinez. Tony could you spell your name and give us your date of birth?

Tony Martinez (TM): Tony, T-O-N-Y M-A-R-T-I-N-E-Z. and my date of birth is June 12th 1961.

MN: Could you tell us a little bit about your family background and how they came to the Bronx?

TM: Well, originally, we're from Cuba. We weren't immigrants, we're refugees. We immigrated to the United States in 1966. And our first place of residence was 1680 Vyse Avenue between 173rd and 174th street, in the Bronx.

MN: How did your family find the Bronx?

TM: Well, during the Cuban Revolution one of my doctors left Cuba -- Castro's take over. And then my father emigrated. The way it was done at the time the US and Cuba didn't have diplomatic relationships, so you had to it through either the Canadian embassy, the Swiss embassy, or the Spanish embassy. And you would, basically, pay off the embassy to get a visa. That's how we ended up in the Bronx. When my father first immigrated, he got here in '62 and he lived in the Bronx where he had met someone who had a factory, a cardboard factory, and he was the super. And we were the second family, Hispanic family, on the block. Back then, it was all Jewish

MN: So he was a building superintendent?

TM: No his friend lived in a factory with a superintendent and he was able to get us the apartment.

MN: Right, and what sort of work did your father do?

TM: Factory worker.

MN: In the cardboard factory?

TM: In the cardboard factory.

MN: And was the factory located in the Bronx?

TM: No it was located in Long Island City.

MN: So he took the subway to Long Island City?

TM: Yea he commuted by subway to Long Island City.

MN: Did your mother come before you --

TM: No, we all came together. It was my sister over here; myself; my mother and my grandmother, who came at the same time in 1966. As a matter of fact, May 11, we celebrated our 40th anniversary.

MN: Did you speak any English when you came to the United States?

TM: Not at all. Not at all. As a matter of fact Spanish had been my first language. It created some problems because in the '60's—the later part of the 60's—the really didn't have the tools, the education or the understanding. Kindergarten was no problem, first grade was a problem for us. Everyone in the household spoke Spanish, by that time my father had left and my mother and he had split up for whatever reason. So in first grade, they kind of put me in a—I don't know if it was considered, I was in 3-13 because they didn't have a Special Ed. Class because of my inability to speak English, but the deemed me mentally retarded. So I was learning disabled first, second and third grade.

MN: In a predominantly white school?

TM: Well at that time, the transition was happening. The school and the neighborhood was becoming more Hispanic and Black. So the Jews, who lived there were moving out. And that was '63 to '67 or '68.

MN: Did your neighborhood go through go through disinvestment, arson, abandonment or did it pretty much stay stable?

TM: No, it didn't. In 1969, that's when the buildings started first burning, and in the later part of the summer—I'm trying to remember exactly—beginning of the fall of '69, our building was torched.

MN: And what number was that?

TM: 1680

MN: 1680 at Vyse Avenue. So if you go back there, your building isn't there?

TM: No, they renovated the whole thing. All the building is there, what happened is it was torched, but it wasn't completely burned. The winter came, and the pipes froze. My mother didn't have the means to move. So we lived there in a practically half abandoned building rotted in water, being unable to do anything from September to about January, then we were able to move. And that's when we moved to the West Bronx to Davidson Avenue.

MN: Davidson between where and where?

TM: Parkside and Tremont. That was 1985 Davidson.

MN: Right, what was the ethnic composition of your block when you finally left the neighborhood?

TM: It was all black.

MN: So it made an almost complete transition.

TM: Yes it did. In a matter of three or four years.

MN: So when you first moved there, you were one of the first Latino families, and by the time you left, all the white families were gone.

TM: They were gone.

MN: Where did they go?

TM: That I don't—at the I couldn't tell you because I was too young, but I realized they all went to Westchester, Long Island and the North Bronx. The demarcation line, surprisingly, was on 180th street at the time.

MN: What was school like for you in those years?

TM: Until about third grade, it was really disappointing. I really didn't enjoy school. I had the fortunate ability to attract individuals and such individuals as Mr. Crane. I'll never forget him. During that period of time, the city was going through a transition with all of the crises, fraud, and so forth. And they didn't have substitute teachers. I was in the third grade and we were in the Special Ed. Class and it was 3-13 because we used to go: 3-1 was supposedly the smartest class and 3-13 was supposedly the smartest class at the time, and that's going a way back. And my regular teacher wasn't there, and the substitute teacher—they didn't have one—so the science teacher for the school, Mr. Krinler, he came in there and he didn't know what to do with me because we were learning disabled. So he started playing games, and he goes to me, 'You know, you don't belong in this class.' He took me to the assistant principle; they gave me a test that didn't require any language arts and he told the principle—the assistant principle—that he would make himself responsible for me. And I went from 3-13 to 3-1 and he brought me

up to speed. Then school became fun because I actually became like his son, and he sort of like my father. So the third, fourth and fifth grade he was with me all the time and I would just walk to the science labs and he really taught me how to enjoy education.

MN: Now, did your reading skills in English improve during this time?

TM: He improved every—I had to improve in math, English, almost everything. He taught me the passion of reading. He was a science teacher.

MN: Did he give you books to take home?

TM: He gave me books. He was the person to take me to the library. He was the first one to tell me about a library card. He was the first one to take me to a baseball game, to Yankee Stadium.

MN: So he took you on his days off to places?

TM: He took me on his days off, after school-- he was a special kind of man. So I, basically, my education and the way that I appreciate literature is because of him.

MN: How do you spell his last name?

TM: K-R-I-N-L-E-R

MN: And his first name?

TM: Michael

MN: We should try to track him down, because this guy is like a hero.

TM: No, he is. The last time—it's so funny because then he transferred and he went to Junior High School 80 and he was the science teacher on Mosholu 149 East Mosholu Parkway. And he was the science teacher there, he had my sister as a student. And the last that I kept in contact with him that I remember, he was setting up the science

department curriculum for a school up in District 9. I don't know what it's called now

because they made the Regents. But I heard he was retired.

MN: When you moved to the West Bronx, how old were you?

TM: I was, at the time, 9 going on 10.

MN: So you were in fourth grade/fifth grade?

TM: Fourth grade prior to his first year.

MN: And what school did you go to in Davidson Avenue.

TM: I went to PS 26 on Andrews and 179th street.

MN: Now, at the time you moved was your mother working?

TM: My mother worked one full-time job and two part-time jobs and then in 1970 she became greatly ill. She had ulcers then hemorrhages. And she almost died, and after that she became disabled and she wasn't able to work.

MN: How siblings did you have?

TM: I have an older brother, who got married of the age of 16 going on 17, so he really wasn't a part of our lives. And I have two younger sisters. One is 44 and the other is 36.

MN: What was Davidson Avenue like when you moved to that neighborhood?

TM: It was predominantly white, because the West Side—the Concourse—was all Jewish and predominantly white at the time. But the individuals from the South Bronx were immigrating, because they had no place to go, so the change was happening. We weren't the first Hispanic family on the block, there were already some. It was a mixture.

Especially for Andrews Avenue, Loring Place, because at that time that was old NYU campus and Bronx Community College.

MN: Now, how did your family relate to other ethnic groups in the community? Let's say Puerto-Ricans, African Americans, West Indians.

TM: [sighs] For me it's always been very easy. One, my father is a black Cuban and my mother is a white Cuban. So that dichotomy has never been a problem for us. So blending in always came second nature. And we didn't know the difference between a Puerto Rican and a Cuban. [laughs] The food is almost the same, the culture, the language, the music. So until I got a lot older, and I started studying Caribbean history and I really started to see the divergence in the ethnic groups of being Puerto Rican. And I tell most people that Puerto Ricans, they're the ethnic group all by themselves.

MN: Did black culture differ from your Cuban/Latino culture in important ways you noticed as a kid?

TM: The big difference was religion. Because ours was law of Santeria, and black American religion was more Baptist, and more mainstream. That was the biggest difference.

MN: So you're Afro-Cuban religion was more important than Catholicism in your upbringing?

TM: No. It wasn't. It's so funny, I was able to understand it, because you would go to Church, and they would tell you all of these opinions religions and all of this. Then you would go home and it would be incorporated into Catholicism. So you had to straddle both sides and it became second—as a kid you didn't know there a difference.

MN: Did your mother have Santeria gods in the house?

TM: My mother was very involved. As a matter of fact, one of my aunts is a Madrina. They had the [inaudible] [143] the whole thing and we would go through her rituals.

Even in the South Bronx, we would—my mother converted to Pentecostal at about 1973.

So then the whole household and religion changed completely. It went from one extreme to another. But, yea, until about '72 or '73 it was part of our everyday life. She had the beads. She had the cigar, the water, the whole works.

MN: What about the music? Did the Cuban music come with you?

TM: Always. It was always—It's still a part of our life.

MN: Who were the artists that were in your home when you were growing up on the record player?

TM: On the record? Well, there was Betty More, Lo Queteragon? Hecto Lavoe, at the time. Then you had the romantic singers, like La Fier, (who was the other guy who was big?), it was La Fania All-Stars, but they were a New York band; Victor Rodriguez.

MN: Now did you pick up other music from the neighborhood, from the school, or were you primarily a Latin music person growing up?

TM: Primarily, it was Latin music growing up. However, from your peers—that's when you, at the time, had R&B. I remember the big thing in R&B was the Philly Tops, the O'Jays, steady.

MN: This is the early '70s.

TM: Right. That's where the other influence came.

MN: Now, you didn't have Motown experience of the '60s?

TM: I was—I did and didn't—I was too young. For example, the first time I heard Michael Jackson and the Jackson 5 was from my brother's girlfriend who brought the forty-five. But it was not something that I would go out and buy. I really didn't start buying records until the '70s.

MN: Did you listen to music on the radio much?

TM: Yes, and that was the biggest fight. The biggest fight for music was between my sister and I. At the time it was WABC, which my sister would want to listen to, at the time it was the top 40. And I was BLS, which was the R&B, Frankie Crocker. We would always fight because neither one of us listened to that, and I didn't want to listen to WABC.

MN: Now you moved to Andrews-Davidson in '69.

TM: It was actually January of 1970, right after New Years.

MN: And what year did you go to junior high school?

TM: '76. The big thing at that time—because we were 6-1—and we were trying to get into the SP program. And the schools, it was 141 and 143 or Junior High School 80. All the Caucasian kids wanted to go to 141 which was in Riverdale. My mother didn't know anything, she was really never involved in our education because she really didn't have... first, she never spoke the language, and her involvement in the school wasn't great. And like I said, if it wasn't for Mr. Krinler, my knowledge of school would have been zero also. So, I ended up in Junior High School 80 with the SP program.

MN: Were there white kids on your block on Davidson Avenue?

TM: There weren't—there was only one white family. The white families were over by Loring, by Hennessy place on University Avenue, Andrews Avenue. I remember there were a couple of Irish kids, there were even some Russian immigrants: that's where the white were. Davidson, Grant, Harrison was majority black and Hispanic. So University Avenue [unintelligible].

Interviewers: Mark Naison, Dolores Munoz

Interviewee: Tony Martinez

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MN: Did you have any issues with gangs in the early '70s? Was that something that made much of an impression on you?

TM: Gangs started making an impression on me in second grade. The first time that I had a problem, I was in the first grade. As a matter of fact, the other day I took my son to Vyse Avenue to show him the alley because he doesn't have a concept of what alleys were. So between 173rd and 174th and [inaudible] you have an alley. I remember in first grade, I hit a kid with a chair. When it was time to get out of school, they were all waiting for me. And they were all much older, and I got chased. And to be so young, I jumped through the fences in the alley to get caught, and they put a beating on my behind. And that was my first encounter with gangs. And then--

MN: Did they have a name?

TM: They belonged to the Baby Lil' Jabbers, at the time. You had the Lil' Jabbers, the Peacemakers, the Black Spades, who was the other group--

MN: Savage Skulls.

TM: The Savage Skulls, the Reapers, the Five Percenters. Those were the gangs, and then I was recruited into the Baby Five Percenters in third grade. And I became the wall counselor.

MN: Of the Baby Five Percenters.

TM: And I remember my first rumble, I threw a bottle and ran. [laughs] That was my first encounter. And luckily the best thing that happened was that we moved to the west side, because that got me away from all of that.

MN: Because things were pretty rough over on Vyse?

TM: On Vyse Avenue. It was Hoe, Vyse, Longfellow, Bryant, it was real rough. I mean, I remember in the third grade they were teaching me how to make a sip-gun. That's another thing I tried to show my son—what a sip-gun was. And he couldn't understand how you make it with a pipe and a car antenna.

MN: Were there any youth programs over at Vyse Avenue?

TM: The first youth program was the Madison Avenue Boys Club, which is still there. What they did—one of the areas that was burnt out: Hoe Avenue and 173rd—they rebuilt it and made it the Madison Avenue Boys' Club. And now it's still there. I was the fifth kid to join. They used to give you a wooden pass, [laughs] so you wouldn't lose it—instead of the plastic one. And my number was 0005. I still—I have it somewhere and kept it. But that was the program, I didn't get into youth programs—involved—honestly until I was later in my life; talking about high school.

MN: So you went to junior high school 80 and you're in the SP, did your being in the SP have any consequences in your neighborhood? Did kids make fun of you for being smart?

TM: I've always led a dual life. I never carried books, because I would always leave them in school—no! it was part of it. I would always leave them in school. I would always do my work in school, and when I got home it was a whole different life. You know, a different Tony.

MN: Did you have to be thug Tony at home, or it wasn't exactly thug Tony?

TM: I was never a thug, because it's not in me to be a thug. I was never abusive, however, I was a hybrid—you could say—in the sense that I was always fighting. I was always into something. And usually, the guys that I ran with were a bunch of older guys, which in the end raised the question, whatever happened to me? Because it got to a point

where they started protecting me and telling me, 'Listen you don't have to do this. You have a future and you don't do this, and whenever there are problems, you can go home.' They became protective of me. To this day, some of them are still my friends.

Dolores Munoz (DM): Being in SP, you're with a much older crowd anyway because you get skipped.

TM: Yes, yes, that was the other thing.

MN: In your junior high did everybody know who the SP kids were?

TM: Yes.

DM: Everyone knew who everyone was.

TM: And the reason that you knew who the SP kids were because they were mostly oriental, white and very few black kids. While the rest of the school was black and Hispanic kids.

MN: Now how did you maneuver that in terms of friends at school?

TM: It has never been a problem, it was always a dual life: sports and everything. Athletics was always the bad kids, and they used to call me a nerd. Because my other friends, I was being a nerd. You know, a love of literature, reading—which I always did.

MN: Did you read at home a lot?

TM: I read at home a lot [unintelligible]. I was never a television person.

MN: So, did you have your own room?

TM: I had my own room, my own little space that I would—and I still do that. It's something you grow up with as a matter of survival, and I always have—in my house I have my own living room where I have a separate—I have two living rooms. I have the

one that everybody comes in, everybody sits down and you greet everyone. Then I have the one which is like a den, which is the library, my music, everything that is for me.

MN: Now by the time your in junior high school, what music was “you.” How did you define yourself through music?

TM: It was R&B. it was [inaudible] Marvin Gaye, [inaudible], [inaudible]

MN: So that became more important to you than the Latin music at that point?

TM: Yes, it did.

MN: Now did that also become associated with having more black than Latino friends?

TM: Socially... no, not really. Because my Latino friends were into the same music. And then the disco came around, and everyone was listening to the disco and the hustle...

MN: So there wasn't any difference between Black and Latino kids and what music they were listening to on the streets on the Bronx.

TM: No. The Latin music, besides those that were forming at the time, was more of an older...

MN: The older folks were more into that? Like people in the twenties, thirties, forties--

TM: Exactly.

MN: So the teens and the twenties were R&B and disco.

TM: Yes.

MN: Did you play any instruments?

TM: It's funny, I did. How I started playing an instrument: What happened, when I was in sixth grade, they would come to the school. And then depending on the school that you were designated or it was... I don't know, I can't remember how they did it. It was by lottery, but some kids were designated 141 went to Junior High School 80. So the

individuals from 80 came to the school and they had a room in the auditorium, then they would ask us questions as to which was our preference. At the time, I still remember, I told the guy, 'I want to play the horn.' And he corrected me, and he said, 'You mean the trumpet.' I said, 'No, the horn,' because I used to listen to Louie Armstrong, Coltrane, and these guys and that was thanks to Krinler because he introduced me to jazz.

MN: Oh, okay.

TM: So, I called it the horns. He said, 'No the trumpet,' he said, 'well we don't have room for you in the band. What you will have to do is go to school orchestra sign up for orchestra, and then we will transfer you into this space in the band. Unbeknownst to me there was never going to space for me in the band, so I started playing violin. And I played violin—Ms. Drucker was the instructor at the time. And she got me—I became very good at it—and she got me a scholarship to take lessons, private lessons, over at 183rd and Field place which used to be the old Bronx Science. First, violin—maestro for the school orchestra, then I played for the Manhattan Ball orchestra.

MN: So that took off for you.

TM: Yes, it took off for me, until I got to college and then I didn't play again. [laughs]

Beer became my hobby.

MN: We've been talking to a number people about the older years of hip-hop. And your neighborhood in the West Bronx was one of the major centers. Were you aware of Cool Herc, and that whole group and their parties at the time?

TM: I didn't become aware of rap until high school. They had a dance, and --

MN: What high school did you go to?

TM: Bronx Science.

MN: You went to Bronx Science?

TM: I went to Bronx Science. At 205th and Paul [or Goulden]. So they had a dance, and it was Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five.

MN: At Bronx Science!?

TM: At Bronx Science, at the cafeteria. And it was 1978, I remember. That was my introduction into rap.

MN: What did you make of it? Or did you just see it as an extension of disco?

TM: No I didn't. I didn't make anything of it. Here I am playing the violin, right.

Classical music most of the time. My influence was Afro-Cuban music. Then jazz through Krinler. So this was totally, totally different. And I remember, I don't know if it was my uncle, I just played this thing, and these guys were just talking to music. And he said, do you know—I can't remember if it was my uncle or my teacher, but I think it was my uncle—and he said, "That is more African than anything in the world. If you ever listen to poetry its rhythm," and he really started--

MN: Wow, so you weren't initially that attracted to it.

TM: No, I wasn't, and he explained to me, if you listen at a Church, a Black Church, everything is in tuned with rhythm. Everything is very active. And that's when I started to see rap, at the time, as different. But it wasn't, it was more of bravado rap—you know dancing, and breaking and all that.

MN: Did you see much in the way of B-boying and breaking in your neighborhood? Or that became later when the movies came out?

TM: I'll tell you when I really became aware of that culture was my freshman year in college. And what happened, one of the guys: my roommate, he was a senior at Clinton

and I was a freshman at Fordham. And we met working at Bloomingdales. And what he did, he started working as a bouncer. And you probably remember Leon Stevenson; big guy, all muscles, about 6'4". He started working at Roxy's as a bouncer. And the DJ was Afrika Bambataa.

MN: Downtown.

TM: Right, this was downtown on 18th Street. The DJ was Afrika Bambataa, and that's when I really became immersed into the hip-hop culture.

MN: You went down to the Roxy.

TM: I went to the Roxy, and I was there all the time. I could get in free. Leon worked the door, and these guys—you had Jazzy Jazz, Melly Mel, everyone in hip-hop at the time all had to go through Roxy.

MN: Where was the Roxy located those days?

TM: It was on 18th street between 10th and 11th. It was a roller rink at first. And everyone and anyone could go there who was into the hip-hop culture.

MN: So you went to Bronx Science, and what made you decide to go to Fordham?

TM: Money. That was really what made me decide to go to Fordham. I became aware of Fordham because I played basketball—I always wanted to play football, but Bronx Science didn't have a football team. So I played basketball.

MN: On the Bronx Science basketball team.

TM: Yes, my senior year I was the captain. And the coach at Bronx Science was Robert De La Renzo, who played basketball at Fordham. He gave us passes to come to the games, when they used to punch them out. So we would see the games, and that's how I

became aware of Fordham, and the Lombardi Center. So I came to work out in the

Lombardi Center since the age of 13.

MN: Where did you play recreational center basketball?

TM: We would play in the streets.

MN: So you didn't play in organized teams like AAU or Community Center.

TM: No, I was always playing football and didn't have a football team at Bronx Science. So I went out for the basketball team, and made the team. Then I played everywhere. I would play in Brooklyn, Queens; anywhere there was basketball I played. St. James Park—where ever there were ball players. Wall Street... anywhere. And then towards my junior year in high school when I got pretty good at basketball, I started playing with teams. I started playing with Rucker, at West 4th St. Tournament, played in the Mount Vernon Tournament. That's when I really started playing all over.

MN: Now you had mentioned meeting Arthur Crier, did you meet him when you were in college or in high school?

TM: I met him when I was in college. However, that was unique. I came to Fordham—I was accepted into Columbia, NYU, Fordham, and the school I really wanted to go to San Diego state [laughs]. I know, my mother said no way because my passion is the beach. So I came to Fordham because it was financially feasible. When I was at Fordham, I was a dual major. It was Biology and Spanish Literature.

MN: Did you want to be Pre-Med?

TM: Yes, I was Pre-Med. Biology and Spanish Literature. And at the time Maria Pas Asfez...

MN: I remember her.

TM: ... she was the chair of the department. And I had Ronald Mendez-Clark, he was more of a friend than a teacher or professor. So I was doing very well in Spanish Literature until I got to Maria's class. And Maria says to me, "You know, you're not going to get an A in this class unless you do a few things." I was a jock and she said, "No, no, no, no this is what you have to do. First you have to join the Mexican Project. And then you have to join Academia Hispánica, AND you have to convince them to do a project in the Bronx." She took me different areas. She took me to Tremont Community Council, she took me to Our Savior, [untelligible]. She said you pick an organization and I want you to work there and convince the kids at Fordham to work with that organization. So I picked Tremont Community Council which is located on Washington between 178th St. and Tremont. It was affiliated with St. Joseph's Parish there, and Arthur Crier was affiliated with the Church and the youth program there. And that's how I met Arthur Crier. He worked on the Community Board. And his wife was on the Community Board as Community Board 6. The chair of the community board, was Patrick Larkner who was the Executive Director of the program. And that was my affiliation. And then I was exposed to a whole different world: doo-wop and the --

MN: How did you get exposed to the doo-wop?

TM: Arthur would take us and invite us when they were at concerts...

MN: So when he was performing.

TM: Yes. And it was a totally different, because I had never really listened to doo-wop.

No one ever told me what was doo-wop.

MN: Now what kind of things did Arthur do with the kids in the neighborhood?

TM: He did a lot. First of all, he was the one who assisted with the not-for-profits in getting funding. He was also in charge of the community board of setting up the different activities for the summer, year round. So he was like the liaison between the community and the --

MN: Did he do sports programs in the neighborhood?

TM: Whatever the not-for-profit—summer camps, the play streets --

MN: What aspect of that work did you enjoy the most?

TM: Being able to do what was done for me. That was what I enjoyed the most. That someone took the time to sit down and actually say, ‘You know what, kid. You are not meant to be handicapped. You have a future,’ and there are so many of those kids out there—right there—that are considered emotionally disturbed, disruptive in class, and most of the time they are very intelligent, it’s just that no one has piqued their interest.

MN: So that experience with Mr. Krinler really shaped what you wanted to do with your life?

TM: Something like that, yes. It did. I mean, it was a powerful influence. What I wanted to do, I believed what really made the difference was working at DR, the not-for-profit at the time. Because I started there in ’80, when I was a sophomore at Fordham. And I stayed there the whole time. As a matter of fact, I stayed with the organization for 20 years.

MN: So you kept working there after you graduated?

TM: Yes, I did.

MN: Now did you go to social work grad school?

TM: No, never did. I never went to pot-graduate.

MN: So you graduated from Fordham and you--

TM: started working there, started developing programs for them. Ran their health care program. And that's how I got involved in the Health field.

MN: Now how did you get the training to administer budgets, and all that stuff?

TM: Like I said, I had always been very fortunate. Someone has always taken the time and said, 'you know what? I'm going to teach you.' Brother Patrick Larken was the chair of the finance committee for Health and Hospital Corporation at the time. There was a Sister Dorothy Sheen, who really became my mentor. And I never needed—she was dean at the University of Pennsylvania, she was the director of Nursing at Dawkin Hospital, she was a charity-- Sister of Charity nun. And she basically became my post-graduate professor. And she taught me management, I received my MBA through her training. And her, she took the time and actually became my mentor.

MN: So you have an MBA now? Or this is a practical MBA?

TM: It's a practical MBA thanks to her. And she really you know—I became a Deputy Director, and she basically just guided me along. And when I was old enough, because there was always that age limit, I started running the program and I became Program Director.

MN: Now in talking about your childhood you mentioned gangs; you mentioned abandonment; you never really mentioned drugs. Was there a serious heroin problem in any of the neighborhoods you lived in?

TM: All the time. As a matter of fact, the first time I became aware of heroin was this kid we used to call "gato." We used to call him *gato* because he was always climbing and jumping.

MN: *Gato* means cat.

TM: Cat. And really I learned that the reason he was always jumping and climbing because he was a cat burglar. He was always breaking into peoples' houses, and that's why they called him *gato*. But when you're seven years old, you attribute it to something else. Then my first—the first time that I had a good friend of mine pass away, it was my best friend; he got high on smoking marijuana. And we used to hop on the back of the buses. That day, I remember because we lived on the first floor, my curfew was at ten o'clock and at quarter to eleven I was sneaking out of the window and we were going to hang out all night long. Then I would to sneak back in before getting up. My mother would get up, and he goes to me, 'Oh! Let's go, let's go,' and that day I said no. And he got high right underneath my window, and he got run-over by bus because he slipped and he died. And I was twelve years old at the time. That was my first encounter with drugs and death. Then about a year later, there was another guy named Anthony who had lived in the neighborhood. He was a black kid. His family had moved out because they lived on the University side. I believe his mother was a psychologist or a teacher, I can't remember exactly. So they moved to Westchester, but he could never really let go of the neighborhood. He moved back in. And at that time what they used to do, they used to skin pop heroin. Where you wouldn't inject it intravenously you just do it on your skin, right underneath your skin. And he ODeD. And I remember when they were pulling him out. But I, I never did drugs. I tried marijuana once, it burned my throat and I never did it again. I had never—it never became part of my culture. And I used to chill with my friend, but I was not going to do that. So I never let peer-pressure get me.

MN: Where did you end up living after you graduated from Fordham?

TM: I went back to Davidson, and I lived with my mother. Everybody had moved out, and my mother and I stayed until I was able to purchase a house. I purchased a two family home, thinking she would move in with me. She never did. She still lives on Davidson.

MN: Really! Same place?

TM: Same place, we have been there since 1970.

MN: What's the cross-street?

TM: Between Davidson and Burnside. It's a long block. She's still there. Everyone knows her.

MN: Is she still in the same Pentecostal Church?

TM: Still the same Pentecostal Church.

MN: What is the name of the Church there?

TM: [?] on 172nd and Washington Avenue. It's still there.

MN: So that's a pretty long trip.

TM: Yes, they pick her up by bus. But she still goes to the same Church, same everything. She doesn't move. I live right here in little Italy.

MN: So when did you buy a house in the Little Italy neighborhood?

TM: It was '97.

MN: Is it one of the new houses?

TM: It was new construction, yes. I've been living there ever since.

MN: Now, in the early '80s you're running a health program in the Tremont Center?

TM: What I used to do, at full salary, I used to run the home care agency. And then I would do—for community service—I would do youth programs out of there. And then

Guliani came to me with the youth program, Division of Youth was completely [unintelligible]. I took it upon myself to do the fundraising and run the program.

MN: And what was the name of the youth program in the Tremont Center?

TM: It was Tremont Community Council.

MN: Tremont Community Council Youth Program, and you kept it going after DF--

TM: -- cut all the funding and that's when I started to use my ability to go in and get entertainers for fundraising. So we would do fundraising, and it was pretty good because it was an all year round program. And in the summer we would pay for them to attend St. Joseph's school, summer school. Most of the kids were able to get sponsors to stay the summer at St. Joseph's. We would do the SYP program for the kids. And then it we would do a day camp, also, for the working mothers. And during the year, during the school years we would have the recreation the tutoring and mentoring.

MN: How did you identify the entertainers and who were they—the people who really supported this effort?

TM: A lot of the Latin Señors, some of the rappers: Fat Joe, Punisher, [inaudible] Nieves, [inaudible], Victor Manuel--

MN: How did you get to them? Through their agents?

TM: I would just go personally and say, 'Hi, how are you doing? My name is Tony Martinez.'

MN: [laughs] How did you find them?

TM: Wherever they would perform. I would make it my business to go over there and introduce myself.

MN: Did you know Fat Joe and Punisher before they made it big?

TM: They were some of the people I used to play basketball with, at the center, before they made it big.

MN: Really? This was when Punisher wasn't that big?

TM: Punisher was a small guy. What made him big, was these steroids that he had to take because of his asthma. That is what blew him up. It was either asthma or thyroid problems, but I know he had taken steroids. It wasn't to work out. It was medically prescribed steroids, and then he ballooned. He became huge by the waist size.

MN: Right. What about Fat Joe? He was just a big guy?

TM: He was always a big guy. As matter of fact, he lost weight. And the other guy was Tony Sunshine, and Cuban Link, all those guys--

MN: And they used to play down at the Tremont Center?

TM: And they used to play basketball all the time.

MN: Where was the gym?

TM: It's at the bottom of the Church.

MN: Was it a nice gym?

TM: No. As a matter of fact, it wasn't until we had a celebrity basketball game. Which Sears sponsored, and they redid the floors, the backboard, they redid the whole gym.

MN: Now, did you have any idea before they were commercially successful, that these guys were particularly talented?

TM: The kids were the ones who pointed it out. The kids were the first ones, because all the kids were getting into it. And one of the kids said, 'You know, Punisher? That's the man.' And that's how I became aware at the time, because the kids would tell me, 'He's the one that's going to make it big.'

MN: Were most of the kids you worked with Latino or African American?

TM: Black and Latino.

MN: And was there, pretty much, a coming together? Were there any differences? Was there fighting? Were there tensions?

TM: Well, we had what they called a North Side, Valentine and we had Monterey, which was the [unintelligible]. You had those groups –

[END TAPE ONE SIDE A, BEGINNING TAPE ONE SIDE B]

TM: --the problem. As a matter of fact, Arthur Crier's step-son's knowledge, David Campbell, Garvey's son. He worked with me. He did a very long stretch in jail. He went in when he was about 17. When he came out, he started working. And there were a lot of ex-offenders that worked for the program. Which the kids—fortunately or unfortunately, it depends on your perspective—they looked up to these guys. So our area was really moved to a ground. So you had the kids from Valentine, Echo Park who came. You had the Hughes Boys, which was a big gang at the time. And you had the kids from North Side, and they would come. And that was the one place where you would have no fighting or anything.

MN: So you created like a safe-zone?

TM: A safe zone, the girls—everyone would come in there—and that would be the place for everyone to be.

MN: And that's in the gymnasium at the Church, at St. Joseph's.

TM: At St. Joseph's.

MN: That priest must have been a pretty remarkable person.

TM: Brother Patrick Larken? He was a monk, a Franciscan Monk. He was an extremely remarkable person, because thanks to him, St. Barnabas'—before St. Barnabas's Hospital was a place for the terminally ill, cancer patients—he led the fight to try and keep Fordham Hospital open. He transferred St. Barnabas' into an acute care hospital. He was instrumental getting a lot of the Hispanics into the health care system. At one time, I was on the board of St. Barnabas, as a union hospital. It was St. Barnabas Union. I was the President of Union Hospital. I was chair of the community advisory board for North Central Bronx Hospital. So, it's been so much and so many things that I've done, and thanks to him he was influential in leading me into the health care industry.

MN: Now, what was your Fordham experience like? Was it mostly positive or mixed bag?

TM: It was the greatest time I've ever had. I was surrounded by very good people. At the time, I remember, you used to play basketball sometimes [laughs]. Mangum was around, there was Sister Francesca. Even though I didn't qualify for the HEOP program, I remember that was disappointing. They didn't know at the time, I told them, 'If I knew that, I would've done terrible on the SATs.' My score was too high, and I couldn't participate in the HEOP program. Then, Father McDermott, but one of the persons that really made a difference for me at Fordham was Ronald Mendez-Clark. He really made my thinking more progressive as to health care, government and entitlement.

MN: Now did your coming from Cuba incline you to being conservative, politically? Was there any period when you had to rethink certain things in relation to American or international politics?

TM: Well, it's interesting. I had this conversation about a month ago. With an individual going to Cuba, and I basically say this to most people: When it comes to Cuba, Castro and your position, it all depends on what side of the fence you were on. If you were white, privileged and had, Castro is the devil because he took everything from you. If you were black, poor and didn't have anything, Castro is god because he gave you something that you didn't have before. He gave you the opportunity to get educated, the opportunity for health care, and he made—one the surface—everyone equal. So it all depends on the spectrum. My father's side of the family loves Castro because they were all black: African-Cubans. And they really didn't have much. My mother's side of the family, my mother included, they really disliked Castro. They lost their land; they lost everything that they had that they considered theirs. Like I said, I always so it for what it was. He came, he changed. And I tell people if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be here.

MN: Have you gone back?

TM: No, I have not. I had one opportunity to go back, when I was on the board of Union hospital. St. Barnabas Union in conjunction with Health & Hospital Corporation were going to have a group go visit the health care system over there. And then someone shot down one of those Freedom Flights, and that was cancelled. I have relatives that go all the time. But me, personally, I have not gone back.

MN: What are your recollections of crack and how it affected the neighborhoods you were working in?

TM: That was the worst thing that ever happened, of all the drugs. One, heroin was bad but the difference is that it took a while to become addicted. You could become functional, because I have a lot of friends who were heroin addicts, but they were

functional. They would do their heroin, but they would work; they would take care of their family. Crack made everybody dysfunctional in a very short period of time. I mean, it is something that did it in one day. The next week, you were addicted to it.

MN: Could you describe the first time, you encountered crack and its effects?

TM: It was friend of mine. His name was Flaco. He was someone that we all grew up with on Davidson. And he started smoking dust first, angel dust, PCP. Then he smoked crack, and this change—everything that he did was, ‘How do I get the next hit?’ And that was my first encounter with it.

MN: And he was a guy who was part of your circle.

TM: He was part of our circle. He was one of seven brothers. And his father was a superintendent. That was my first encounter with crack. Then, I started seeing the kids parents—not so much the kids—but their parents. They started neglecting the kids, and prostituting themselves, and how crack became their focus and the kids were left abandoned. They would lose their apartments. They would try to have to find housing to place the kids.

MN: Which neighborhoods was this in?

TM: We worked at the Fordham Tremont Center, so you’re talking about Hughes, Belmont, Washington, Bathgate, Park Avenue, Arthur Avenue, Mapes, that area.

MN: Below 180th street mostly?

TM: Up until 1986, Quarry Road, you couldn’t go north of that.

MN: In other words, and explain this to Princess, if you were Black and Latino you didn’t go north of 180th street.

TM: You did not go north of that. As a matter of fact, my mother used to go shopping at the market all the way of there. And I didn't like going with her. I wouldn't go with her because, even though she was a white Cuban and would fit right in, I get there and see the kids and I would feel really uncomfortable though I was with my mother. I didn't start going to Little Italy—I remember that day—on the football there was this kid named Tommy Cali. He was the strongest kid in the US. At the age of 18 he bench pressed 515.

MN: On what football team was he?

TM: At Fordham University football team. And he used to play offensive guard. He was a wonderful guy. I remember, he said, 'Let's go to eat on Arthur Avenue,' and I said, 'I don't go there.' He said, 'You are coming with me.' [laughs] And that was my first venture, really, to go eat on Arthur Avenue. In 1986, that's when I really met the individuals on Arthur Avenue who were Joseph Z., Joe Chishu who lived on Belmont. One of the kids who didn't know came form Puerto Rico, and him and his cousin went into the park right there on Arthur, and he got hit with a baseball bat and killed. And there was riot. It really became an incident, a big incident.

MN: This is '86?

TM: This is 1986. And just because they didn't want—you couldn't go. As the border became smaller—Little Italy became smaller and smaller, they became more entrenched. And the park, that was their--

MN: Their turf.

TM: That was their turf and you could not go into the park. And this kid didn't know, he had just come here form Puerto Rico, and he was hit with a baseball bat and killed. And they had actually become part involved, because he had people from the

Belmont/Tremont area become upset and they really did not need the tension. It's also since I attended Fordham; I lived in the neighborhood. It was—I didn't want to believe it at the time, but I was the right token at the time to be at the forefront. So I would go and I would speak at the different boards, when they had press conferences. And that's when I became involved in Little Italy, and that's why I decided to buy a home here. I moved in and I felt comfortable. It goes back to that point. As a matter of fact, I remember, in the early '90s, that's when James and Doug played on the basketball team. And we would play, and at the basketball courts in Little Italy. We started to attracting a big block, black population. They took the courts down.

MN: Right, they took the baskets down.

TM: Right. They took them down. And this was 19--

MN: Now they only have handball courts.

TM: Right, that's all they have.

MN: In other words, the response to the black kids playing in the park was to get rid of the basketball courts. And they don't have them anymore.

TM: They don't have them. And the reason that the black kids felt comfortable playing, is that you had the basketball team here that was integrated, some other kids lived off campus, and we would all go play there. And it was the college students, and once the kids on the outer parts saw that, then you got good run. You know, if you would have asked, "Where would I go play?" I would go play wherever there good players. You didn't want to waste your time. so the kids started seeing that you had Division 1 basketball players playing pick-up game. And they would go there and they moved the baskets.

MN: That actually happened a lot of places around the city in those years—in the late '80s and early '90s. So what was the communities response to the crack? Is there another side? Did you see kids who made a whole lot of money?

TM: Oh, yea. A lot of my kids grew up dealing. That was my biggest challenge was to try to convince them that fast money was no good. They were dealers, the big thing to deal was crack and marijuana. Nickel baggers and dime baggers. So all the kids started dealing with the nickel bags and the dime bags, and they would graduate to crack, which was the fastest money.

MN: Now, Fat Joe calls himself Joey Crack.

TM: Every kid between the late '80s and '90s, you know '91, '92, '93, '94 all of them dealt crack.

MN: Now was this the kids who were doing well in school as well as the --

TM: No, these were the kids that were smart. See the ones that were intelligent, didn't go to school, but they were smart enough to start their own network and their own corner. So most of the fighting and the killing was regarding the spot. Regarding who had what spot, and this is my corner, or my building, and that's where the fighting came from. It really became violent when the Dominican influence came in, because most of the Dominicans were standing there talking about large quantities of cocaine being moved in. And you were talking a lot of money, and that's when it really started to get violent.

MN: When did you start noticing a significant Dominican population?

TM: In the '90s.

MN: Now, were there tensions between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans and African-Americans?

TM: There were. As a matter of fact, one of the things that I couldn't understand is how Puerto Ricans view the Dominicans as less. And I used to say, 'Listen, I'm not Puerto Rican. I'm inferior. Their not Puerto Ricans, and their not inferior. But that was the biggest tension. And also, understand that the first Dominican immigrants were the least educated. The ones that were really trying to escape poverty. So their ability to speak Spanish was terrible, because they really didn't speak Spanish. They spoke a dialect and it was hard for a Hispanic to understand. So that created that sense of them being inferior.

MN: Was there a racial element in that Dominicans are darker, on average, than Puerto Ricans?

TM: There was that element. That was one of them. The other was that it was very difficult for Dominicans to assimilate. They really didn't have the structure or the support systems that Puerto Ricans had when they came here. You know, the same systems that I had. They weren't there for the Dominicans, until [inaudible] de Dominicana [165] started coming around and forming groups for themselves. The other issue, which really I couldn't understand, was the tensions between the Dominicans and the Blacks.

Dominicans didn't consider themselves black. And that created problems. That goes even as far as Puerto Ricans, right? Puerto Ricans didn't consider themselves black, either.

Where I was raised, Cuba was different. In Cuba, the racism is very definite. There was no mixing. You were told, "Listen, you are black. You are supposed to do this." As a matter of fact, my father couldn't go dancing with my mother at the clubs because it was segregated. So, to me, black was black. There was no different in the way you were discriminated against, because that was how I was brought up. You know, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans didn't see it that way. I remember going to the Dominican Republic and

the Dominicans looking down on the Haitians. And I had a friend, who was darker than I am, and he commented on Haitians. And to ridicule him, what I would do is, if you travel through the Dominican Republic they have kids, dark skinned kids selling peanuts in the corner. And most of the time they would be Haitian, and I said, 'How do you know he is Haitian? He could be a Dominican.' And I would call the kid over and ask him his name. he gave me a Spanish surname, and asked if he was Dominican. Then I would turn to my friend and say, 'Blue black? He's not Haitian. He's one of you.' Those are the dynamics of that community and problems, and to this day there is still that problem. And it's not just exclusive to Dominicans; West Indians, they try to distinguish themselves from African-Americans. I used to go play basketball in Wakefield, in the valley. I used to go, and it was all West Indians. And they would accept me because I was Cuban. I never really had a problem—and it's funny! Isn't it! I would never have a problem going from one group to another.

MN: Now you are suggesting that during the years of the crack epidemic there were some really smart kids who decided that the streets made more sense than school.

TM: As a matter of fact, I won't mention his name. There were five brothers, one of the kids worked here in the cafeteria. They ran the spot on Bathgate Avenue between 178th St. and 179th. They ran that whole street. He was one of them. He was really the brains of it. The other brothers were the muscles. I don't know if he was aware. There was another couple guys on Bathgate Avenue. I remember the police officer's name was Diaz. He went in there, and they set him up and shot him three times in the back, on the floor. Those were the guys. The only smart one was him. And he was the one who worked in the cafeteria here. He would clean up, everything. Everybody would laugh at him. You

know, the streets, back home because it was good. You had this and that. So when everything happened, he was the only one able—because he had a job and he paid his taxes—he had a whole load of money stashed away. Now he has a very successful catering business. But he made his money by selling crack.

MN: So some of the people were in that crack business were able to move it into legitimate business.

TM: Oh, I could tell you right now there are night clubs, businesses that I will not name, that are respectable in the community. Some of these guys received awards. They grew up with me, dealing and [unintelligible] at the time made their money doing bad. That is just the American way. Because if you go into the late 1800s, it was the same thing.

MN: So, I got a whole generation of kids who saw crack as opportunity while other people saw it as destroying their neighborhood.

TM: Right. And there is very few of them. The ones that were really successful were the ones that never used it. Because they were a whole school of kids that were selling, dealing, there were lookouts, there were runners, but they were getting high.

MN: That's what Biggie Smalls in 10 Crack Commandments says 'never get high on your own supply.'

TM: And these are the kids, and a lot of them, most people think it was random violence—No! some of these kids were given motives to sell. They would smoke it up, they didn't have the money, so then the guy who ran the spot, he had a choice. He either hurt the kid, made an example of him, or everybody started taking him for his money. So a lot of the kids got shot and killed because they used up the product, and couldn't pay it back.

MN: Would you say a significant number of kids you knew never made it out of those years?

TM: Quite a few. As a matter of fact, Rivera Funeral Home, right there...

MN: On what street?

TM: On Bathgate. They became very good friend of mine. Because, unfortunately, a lot for these kids didn't have the means for a funeral, and I would call and I would speak to them and broker a deal for them. And I became good friends, because it was averaging a kid a week.

MN: Wow. So these years were rough for you.

TM: They were very rough. I remember there was one kid, really two kids who I had got since they were little—and what happened was unbelievable. One of the kids, his name was Gary, the most gifted athlete that I have ever seen that never made it. He played every sport, and excelled at every sport. Then he started dealing. And there was another kid, Mikey, who was quiet, working, and the pizza shop is still there on Tremont and 3rd Ave. I know the father who started it, the son: Frank, Bobby. And Bobby gave Mikey a job there. And he would work after school. Gary borrowed money from Mikey because he used up something and couldn't pay it up from his own money. I think it was \$200 or something like that. And Gary never paid him back. And every time Gary would see Mikey he would disrespect him, saying 'No, get out of here. You're embarrassing me' and this and that. And one day, I don't know what snapped in Mikey's head, that Gary really embarrassed him in front of everybody. And the next day, Mikey waited for him, and when Gary came, he shot him and killed him right there. And what was sad was he just started throwing up, left the gun, just dropped to the floor and started crying after he

did it. He didn't go anywhere. He just stood there because these are kids that grew up together: life-long friends. They called the police, got him arrested, and he went to jail for murder.

MN: So do you have a bunch of kids upstate also?

TM: I'll tell you happened. I have a bunch of kids everywhere. They are growing. When it became difficult here, because of police enforcement, they started cracking down on the violence. Some of the kids got very smart, and started going upstart to Middletown. It's on the outskirts. And they set up operations up there. So I have kids that live up in Middletown who own property and are doing well because they started selling drugs and they would go back and forth. Back in Middletown they became big players, because they didn't have the competition that they have.

MN: Interesting. Well, do you have anymore things that you haven't had a chance to say?

TM: Right now, what I did after Wild Cat, I set up an alternative center of youth kind of program..

MN: Okay, now Wild Cat is the school?

TM: No, Wild Cat it was a multi-service organization started 33 years ago. And Emalia De Cons...

MN: Oh, okay! From the West Side.

TM: Right, she used to be the Deputy of—Mayor—of Lindsay. She started the organization and she received a grant for \$1.5 million to do for youth in under-funded areas. She had asked me to put it together for her. Which we did.

MN: What year was that?

TM: 2002. The US Department of Labor, and that's how I became involved with Dolores and the [inaudible] [284] club here at Fordham because I was trying to get these kids who were incarcerated or in transition out of institutions to start becoming connected with the community and higher education and a different life.

MN: Right, so, you started running this program in two thousand--

TM: and two.

MN: Now, is this a city-wide program or state-wide or local?

TM: It's a borough wide.

MN: It's a Bronx program.

TM: And there were 29 programs that were awarded a contract throughout the country.

Two years ago, they narrowed it down to six programs to work exclusively with the court system.

MN: These are ex-offenders.

TM: Not ex-offenders. From age 14 to 24—some of them are convicted, adjudicated and in lieu of going to prison, they are mandated to the program.

MN: So this is alternative to our incarceration program.

TM: Exactly. Right now, as a matter of fact on Friday I meet with the Bronx Supreme Court, because the program was ended for Wild Cat and they were so successful that they would like for me to develop a program for them.

MN: Now where was the location--

[Tape drops out]

DM: Aren't you hot?

MN: I'm very hot. I'm the non-tropical person here. So the program: where were the offices?

TM: Hunts Point.

MN: And I noticed there's also a Wild Cat school, is there any connection between the two?

TM: Amalia Vatatez(?) about ten years ago saw the need for alternative rehabilitation, and started the John B. Hilty(?) Academy which is a charter school. And that's where we won associates by working with charter schools. We were very successful. They have the Wild Cat Academy, which is grades 9th and 10th, in the Bronx. And then they have the senior academy, which is grades 11 through 12 down at Bowery Park.

MN: And the program you were running just ended?

TM: Just ended.

MN: The grant--

TM: No, what happened: we were awarded a five year grant until the year 2012.

Unfortunately, Mr. Thompson retired, there is a new CEO. She didn't see things the same way; everything got restructured. So somehow, somehow, the US Department of Labor rescinded the grant. But, right now we are in the process to make sure that the Bronx Supreme Court receives that money, because we are talking three million dollars. Which is sorely needed and there is influence behind it.

MN: Well, we won't ask you to talk about this. Okay, you describe nearly 40 years of involvement in the community. Any final thoughts as we conclude this?

TM: I was having a conversation, because right now I run medical facilities, and the owner of the facility—he's a former graduate that I met when I was a freshman and he

was in law school—his name is Bob Sleensby. I was having a conversation with him this morning. I said that, you know, what's disheartening is that for 40 years we have been trying to solve a problem the same way. And they haven't realized that, unless they start with kids when they are very young, and give them an opportunity to excel, we will continue to live in this cycle. And it's not seen, because every time I turn around, instead of putting money into the education for the younger ones and developing opportunities, they would just cut and take it away. And then they want you to do something for the kids that are 15, 16 and 17 years old that are already into the system that once you get into jail, you get a whole different lesson and you never come back the same way. Your perception of life is altered completely. And what you see as being a way out—as change—to get these kids, then to become mainstream is almost impossible. The opportunities for them are not there. They are excluded because of the fact that they have been incarcerated by nearly every civil service job—to the point where you can't qualify for a grant for an education: Pell, TAP, none of that. So then how do they expect for them to turn their life around? To me, to get it right, you have got to get them before their formative years: before the age of seven. That's what saved me. If this man had not, I don't think that someone would have been able to make a difference--

MN: But then you're talking about teachers that are willing to work 24/7, and take kids under their wing after school, take them places, work with them, give them extra work, take them to the library, take them to ball games, almost be a surrogate parent.

TM: Exactly. And one of the things that... whatever program I've been involved in which has been very successful, I have told whomever I hire, 'This is not a job, this is a way of life.' If you can't do this, don't take the job. You do more harm to that child, than

you do good. Because here, you come into his life, you give him a ray of hope, and then when he really needs you, you're not there or you're not accessible... then it fails. Every kid that has ever come into one of my programs, they have my home number, my cell number. They become integral. And to my part of it, my son: he attends Fordham Prep. But he's always been a part of these kids, he's never been segregated. One of the things that they really notice is that my son is different. I tell them, "No he's not. You know him, the only thing is that I don't allow him to do the things your parent or your mother allow you to do. But he is no different than you. And you could do the same thing that he does." So that is the only thing that I find disheartening, is how policy never gets it right.

MN: Do you think we need to get more dedicated people into the school system? Or do you think you need more people in the community programs than in the schools?

TM: It starts with us as a society: how we see teachers. Everywhere that I've been, outside of the United States, teachers are seen on par or even superior to doctors, professionally, because these are the individuals that mold their children. In the United States, teachers are seen as a job. They don't really respect them as professionals. He's not master--

DM: They don't even get paid enough for what they do.

TM: So, in every country I've seen, the teacher—being in a village, being in a town—is seen as someone who is respected. And wherever he is, he is always teaching. He's always instructing on kids on their behavior and every way. You don't get that here anymore. Like I said, I was fortunate. Mr. Krinler was that type of individual that saw it differently. And really made it right, and it wasn't just me. There was another kid, Vincent, there was a couple of us that he actually took by the hand.

DM: We were just talking about that yesterday, when we met up with this girl and she said that one teacher was willing to help that much, is always a teacher--

MN: The principal said, 'You're going to the Ivy League'

DM: And if she didn't say that, she never would have even applied.

MN: It was a principal who knew every single kid in the school.

DM: and their schedules.

TM: But you see, let me tell you what is the most important thing for a kid. It is really: Know their name. Know where they live. That's all you need to know. If you know their name and know where they live, they feel important. It's so simple. They feel like, 'I'm somebody,' by being recognized and being acknowledged. Just know their name and where they live, and now that's not happening. Now teachers become teachers as a way of making money until they get their real jobs. So, that's where the generation is lost.

MN: Okay, well thank you very much. This was--

[END OF INTERVIEW]