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Bronx African American History Project
Fordham University

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Transcriber: Connor Murphy

Mark Naison (MN): Hello, this is the 1 24th interview of the Bronx African-American History Project. Its August 9th, 2005, we are at Fordham University with Deloris Martin, who is very active in the Doo W op and music scene of the Bronx of the 1950s, and is also someone who worked in private industry and New York City government over the years. Deloris, how did your family come to the Bronx. What year did - - do you know what year they moved to the Bronx?

Deloris Martin (DM): I think '41.

MN: And where were they living before that?

DM: 1 16th Street, but I couldn't be sure exactly, 1 16th and Harlem.

MN: And where did they move to when they moved to the Bronx?

DM: 736 Home Street.

MN: Between where and where?

DM: Forest and Jackson Avenues.

MN: What did that block look like when you were growing up?

DM: There were four apartment buildings, four apartment buildings, one two three four apartment buildings in the whole block, a grocery store - - that's all in the block, that's it in the block.

MN: Now were these apartment buildings like walk - -

DM: Four stories, [Crosstalk] walkups.

MN: They were walkups, with fire escapes?

DM: Yes.

MN: And how old were you when you moved to Home Street.

DM: I started school in Home Street, so I had to be six, five or six.

MN: Five or six. And was the block you lived on mostly African-American or was racially mixed?

DM: When I moved there I believe it was racially - - yes, it was racially mixed when I moved there. And then after a fashion, it was mostly black.

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

DM: He was a tailor.

MN: And your mother?

DM: A dietician.

MN: Now, what parts of the country were they from?

DM: My dad was born in Pennsylvania, my mom was born in Virginia.

MN: And did they meet in New York City?

DM: Yes.

MN: Now did they have other relatives who lived in the Bronx, or other family members?

DM: No, no, no.

MN; Did they belong to a church?

DM: My mom, I don't know about my dad. I don't believe - - I don't remember my dad going, attending church.

MN; What church did your mother attend?

DM: My mother attended a church, it used to be a shame, called Universal Hagers Spiritual Church.

MN: So was this a storefront church, or it was a - -

DM: No. It was a *regular* - -

MN: Was this in the Bronx - -

DM: In Manhattan.

MN: In Manhattan. And did you grow up going to church?

DM: Yes.

MN: That church?

DM: And others.

MN: What are your earliest memories of Home Street? You know, was it a - - do you remember it as a positive environment?

DM: Yes.

MN: Describe what the street was like outside your building, on a typical, let's say, spring day.

DM: Kids playing in the street, I mean right in the street, shooting what we call skeletons. That was my favorite. We did skelzi, we jumped rope, and we had benefit of the Forest House right around the corner. They would close that block off at times.

Skating, roller-skating, bicycle - - I wonder where we rented those bicycles from?

MN: Do you remember this as a safe environment?

DM: Oh yes.

MN: Was it safe because the adults looked out for the kids?

DM: Absolutely.

MN: And how did that work?

DM: Any parent was allowed to say something to you, any parent was allowed to say something to

you. We knew it so we guided ourselves by that, conducted ourselves by that.

MN: What elementary school did you attend?

DM: P.S. 63, still standing I believe.

MN: On Boston - -

DM: Boston Road.

MN: And what was that experience like for you.

DM: Oh, I remember loving school. I did, I loved school.

MN: Were the teachers supportive and encouraging for you.

DM: Ms. Goldberg. Very supportive.

MN: What grade did you have Ms. Goldberg in?

DM: Oh my, fourth, fifth, yes.

MN: And what were some of the things that she - - it's very vivid when somebody remembers a teacher like that. What was she - - something that made her so memorable to you?

DM: She was strict, she was very strict, but - - I don't know, I don't know how to answer more about that, I really don't. I just remember her name.

MN: What were some of the places you and your friends went in the neighborhood? Did you ever go to the movies?

DM: The Tower Theatre on Boston Road, where we saw those come back next week to finish things. We went there, spent the whole day on Saturdays at the Tower Theater, and we also had one called the King Theatre further down Boston Road.

MN: Now was Boston Road a place you felt safe going with your friends?

DM: Oh yes.

MN: Now what about in your household - - was there music in your house?

DM: All the time. I have sisters - - I'm the youngest of - - my mother had four girls and I'm the youngest, so I heard their music. From their music, or from my mother's music on down.

MN: What was the kind of music your mother loved best?

DM: My mother - - well she didn't actually play too much. My sisters would have played more music. My mother, well, she liked gospel, my mother. But she also liked R&B. And my sisters, they played R&B.

MN: Now did any of them play instruments or sing, of your sisters?

DM: Oh my oldest sister played the guitar and she sang, my oldest sister.

MN: So where did your love of music come from? Was it something, you know - - that this was very much part of your family but was also part of the whole community?

DM: Whole community, whole community. Family and community.

MN: Were there any musicians who lived on your block?

DM: Oh yes, around the corner. I want to say Fats Waller, but I don't believe he really was Fats Waller. Heavy-set guy, played something. The Brathwaite family, a lot of musicians in that family, the Brathwaite family. George Brath, he calls himself Brath now. But at that time he calls himself Brath. He made a saxophone - - he made his own double saxophone. He is the reason I got interested in jazz.

MN; So you were ajazz fan as well as an R&B and Doo Wop fan?

DM: I started to like jazz when I was like seventeen.

MN: So when you were in high school?

DM: Yes.

MN: Now, when you - - where did you go to junior high school?

DM: P.S. 10, Eagles Junior High School.

MN: Was that all girls? [Crosstalk]

DM: Yes. 161st Street and loth, I think it is loth Avenue.

MN: And what was that experience like? Was that as positive as P.S. 63?

DM: Yes.

MN: Were you involved in any clubs or student activities at that time, in junior high?

DM: No.

MN: When did you start actually singing? How old were you?

DM: Well you know I never sang professionally.

MN: But just singing, you know, for recreationally or - -

DM: Oh, six years old, five, six years old.

MN: Did you ever sing in a church choir?

DM: Yes, my mother's church. Oh I sang, I wasn't in the choir, but I would do solo - -
from time to time I'd be asked to do a solo.

MN: When did you first start going to hear live music performances? Did you ever go to
the Apollo, or some of the venues in the Bronx?

DM: The Apollo Theatre. But moreover, for live entertainment, when I was I guess
maybe nineteen to twenty, we had the Blue Morocco, that waS owned by Silvia, of [DM
and MN in unison] Micky and Silvia. And that was walking distance. I was just allowed
to - - I was just at the age where I was allowed to go into a bar.

MN: Now were you still living at Home Street?

DM: Yes.

MN: What was - - Describe Silvia's Blue Morocco. What it was like, you know, from the outside and then inside. You know, you're walking down Boston Rd. and here is the Blue Morocco. What does it look like, what does the outside look like?

DM: Elegant. It was elegant looking, yes, very elegant looking. They had an area that if you wanted to see the entertainment, you had to go - - it was a curtain that they would draw. You could sit at the bar or the entertainment - - if you wanted to enjoy it, you had to be behind the curtain. And they draw the curtain and you had to go behind there. And we did see - - Nancy Wilson started there. Other people I have seen there too. People who have made it today, you know, sang there.

MN: So this was very exciting having this within walking distance.

DM: Yes it was. We used to go back and forth. Because we went across the street to another bar, I can't recall the name.

MN: Is it --

DM: Freddie's.

MN: Freddie's. So you'd go back and forth between Silvia's and Freddie's. Did you ever go into Goodson's?

DM: And then we started to go to Goodson's - - all of them. We liked Freddie's, Goodson's and yes.

MN: What about the Hunts Point Towers?

DM: Oh yes, we've been there. We used to go there.

MN: Now, did you - - you know, I've seen you dance, so clearly you like to do that. Was that something that started also fairly early?

DM: Yes.

MN: Where did you first start dancing?

DM: At one time, they didn't allow me to go in - - Morris High School yard - - the crowd was maybe six years older than me. But I wasn't allowed so I would stay outside and watch the dances.

MN: They would have dancers in the school yard - -

DM: In the school yard. They brought the music there, and they danced in the school yard. And I was influenced by a woman named, today, Juanita Leslie.

MN: She was one of the older kids who encouraged - -

DM: Yes - - to dance. She just danced. Yeah, she was a dancer.

MN: And what were the dances the kids were doing in those days. Were there names for them?

DM: After a fashion, but when we were doing our dances - - I don't know, we never called it anything [Laughs]. You know, when regular dances came out, like, the, you know, things like that, I can't remember the names.

MN: So there were outdoor dances in Morris School Yard. Was this sponsored by the school, or just kids would do this on their own?

DM: I think Department of Parks had to sponsor it.

MN: See, wow. Now, did you go to any dances at like Atlas - -

DM: Rockland Palace.

MN: Rockland Palace, you went to the Rockland Palace. Hunts Point Pallace.

DM: Yes.

MN: Were there any other places in the Bronx which had dances?

DM: No. Manhattan more.

MN: Did you dance to Latin music as well or - -

DM: Some of the girls used to go - - I didn't go too much - - to the Playdium. But I would Latin dance wherever I went. They would eventually play Latin music and you would Latin dance.

MN: Now, when you were growing up, were there many Puerto Rican kids in the neighborhood or - -

DM: No, there really weren't. Nope.

MN: It was a mostly black neighborhood by the time you were growing up?

DM: Yes.

MN: What about at Morris High School?

DM: Oh Morris High School was mixed. You know Morris High School was the first high school in the Bronx, and it was mixed, yes.

MN: What are some of the best recollections of your childhood? The things, you know, that really put a smile on your face when you're thinking of growing up in Home Street and those years.

DM: We belonged to the Forest House, the community center, and it was really a haven for us. And they would take us on trips - - it was to integrate. We would go to places where we would spend the day with girls that were of Jewish persuasion, and we would spend the day with them. And we loved that so much. We used to look forward to it.

MN: Was this at summer camps or resorts that you - -

DM: They were resorts. The girls that we went to visit, they were staying there, and we would just go for the day.

MN: And you would go swimming and play ball and go in boats and - -

DM: Yes. Oh my god.

MN: Wow. And this was going on in the '40s and '50s?

DM: Yes.

MN: These trips, and this was during the summer, and - - did you ever go on day trips to, like, Coney Island or - -

DM: We took ourselves. [Crosstalk] Eventually when we got to be teenagers, we would ride the trains to Coney Island, yes.

MN: Was there any time when you were growing up where you had worries or concerns about gangs in the neighborhood?

DM: Never.

MN: So that was never an issue for you?

DM: Never.

MN: What about friendships? Did you have a lot of strong friendships with girls you grew up with or went to school with?

DM: In the year 1989, I was sitting in my home and I was feeling a little despondent, and I called up nine girlfriends that I knew from Home Street from the time I was six years old, nine. And I said to each one, "How about a reunion?" They all said yes. In 1989, nine of us met. There would have been ten of us, one didn't come. We had a reunion in the Bahamas.

MN: Wow.

DM: And now *it's only* eight of us *living* now.

MN: Now what did you feel like when they did urban renewal of your block and built public housing there?

DM: Well by that time - - I didn't even know it until I went over there and seen it. Well actually, they still have residential - -

MN: Oh there is still - -

DM: My block, my particular block is still residential.

MN: Oh, so it's still there.

DM: But not my building.

MN: Ok, so Home Street is still intact.

DM: Forest and Jackson.

MN: Oh that's right, its north of the Forest houses.

DM: I don't know north-east, west-south something [Laughs].

MN: Ok, now tell me a little about the social clubs that you were part of. Because a number people doing research on this period say that these were very important for young women. How old were you the first time you were involved in a social club?

DM: Twelve. The Sinclettes (SP?). Our colors were act-one (SP) black. We had sweaters with our nicknames.

MN: Do you have any pictures of yourself?

DM: Oh I wish, [crosstalk] someone would have them.

MN: If you could get - - that would be great - -

DM: Someone, one of those girls got to have.

MN: Right, the Sinclettes. Now did you organize this yourselves or were there mothers involved?

DM: Just us girls.

MN: And you were all in junior high at this point?

DM: Yes.

MN: Now, what gave you the idea to form a social club?

DM: Probably was influenced by someone at the Forest neighborhood house. Probably was influenced that way, or we just had enough sense, we're going to have a club.

MN: And what were some of the things you did?

DM: As a club?

MN: Yes.

DM: We gave socials. It would be maybe in someone's apartment. We didn't make cookies or nothing like that - - what else did we do? [Laughs]

MN: When you say you have a social, that would be - - it was like a little party.

DM: Yes.

MN: And this was boys as well as girls?

DM: Yes.

MN: And were the parents there to chaperone?

DM: Oh yes. Especially when it was at my house; there was always a chaperone.

MN: And did you go on trips, or was it mostly in the neighborhood?

DM: We went on trips.

MN: Now, at what point did you start noticing that the singing groups were really something important in the neighborhood? How old were you when your friends or people around the block started singing in street comers and harmonizing?

DM: Fourteen, fifteen.

MN: And was that a very exciting time?

DM: Oh yes, I wanted to be [Laughter] - - I wanted to be in the Mellows, that was the group Lillian was with. I wanted to sing with the Mellows. Harold picked Lillian, as I say.

MN: Was she part of the Sin - - of your - -

DM: Oh yes, part of the Sinclettes.

MN: Now, how did he pick Lillian? Were you all singing together and he heard you all?

DM: Well he knew all of our voices; he knew what we all sound like. He used to sort of, you know, he would tell us, teach us. He gave us instructions, you know, how to sing, how to make the harmony, you know.

MN: Now was he somewhat older?

DM: Yes.

MN: How much older?

DM: Harold Johnson. Harold might have been maybe ten, maybe eight years older than us.

MN: Now did he have experience in the recording industry, or - -

DM: I would say yes, yes. Is he on the picture? Harold Johnson. I don't think so.

MN: So, did he have in his mind that he was going to have a group that was going to record and sing professionally?

DM: Oh yes.

MN: Were there other groups in the neighborhood who were making records that put in somebody's head the idea this could be done?

DM: No, no.

MN: How old were you when you first met Arthur Cryer?

DM: Sixteen, seventeen.

MN: And you knew him from around the neighborhood?

DM: Yes.

MN: From the street, or from Forest House - -

DM: From the street, yes.

MN: And were you aware that he was a singer?

DM: Yes.

MN: So, what was Morris High School like? Was that a good experience for you going to that school?

DM: Yes, yes.

MN: Did most of the kids in the neighborhood go to Morris, or they went to a lot of different schools?

DM: They went to different schools, but I think the majority of us graduated Morris.

MN: Were there any teachers that made a big impression on you?

DM: I can't remember anyone's name. I remember Ms. Goldberg from elementary, but-

MN; But not the teachers - -

DM: I can't remember a name from - - [Laughs]

MN: Were a lot of your - - one of the interesting questions - - when you were growing up, was the goal of young women to get married at a fairly young age, or was career considered more important?

DM: Hm, what did we talk - - I don't remember us talking so much about marriage. No, career.

MN: Did a lot of your friends get married in their teens, or mostly in their twenties?

DM: Mostly in their twenties.

MN: So people were looking forward to getting jobs?

DM: Yes.

MN: And what was your first job?

DM: After high school, I remember going around looking for jobs was a disappointing experience, that was. Until I finally took a job standing behind a steam table in a hospital. And my feet swelled. My mother told me, "You have to quit that, you cannot have that." And I had a high school diploma, and I couldn't get a job.

MN: Did you feel that there was racism - -

DM: Discrimination, oh yes. In the job - - that's when I felt it. I didn't feel it until I went to job hunt.

MN: So in the neighborhood you never felt it.

DM: Never.

MN: But when you went downtown - -

DM: Yes.

MN: And what sorts of jobs were you looking for. Secretarial or - -

DM: Clerical, anything in the clerical - -

MN: And you felt that, like, in private industry and downtown you definitely faced racial discrimination.

DM: Oh yes.

MN: Was it subtle or open?

DM: Subtle.

MN: And was this a common experience among your friends?

DM: Yes.

MN: So you ended up with a job in a hospital behind - -

DM: For a short period of time.

MN: And then what happened after that?

DM: I don't recall, but eventually private industry I got hired as a clerical person. I was sent from an agency. I got it through an agency. So, they made me a file clerk for god's sakes, you know. All you have to do is know your ABCs. And then from there I advanced in that company.

MN: So you were overqualified for your first position.

DM: [Laughs] That's funny. Yes.

MN: Did you stay in the Bronx after high school?

DM: Yes.

MN: And stay in that Morrisania community or did you move - -

DM: I moved out of that area eventually. After high school my mother bought a home on LaFontaine Avenue (SP?).

MN: Now what neighborhood is that in?

DM: LaFontaine, between Tremont - - Arthur and Hughes Avenue. So it is - -

MN: It's right up here. Above the Cross Bronx Expressway?

DM: Yes.

MN: And so you moved in there.

DM: Yes.

MN: Did you ever go back to the old neighborhood?

DM: Home street, oh yes. Everything was still – a lot of stuff was still there. Some people were still there. Yes.

MN: So was the, you know – was Boston Road still –

DM: Hot!

MN: -- a hot place?

DM: Oh yes.

MN: What was Boston Road like on a Saturday night?

DM: Ooh, it was hot [Laughs].

MN: Everybody would be dressed up and you know –

DM: Well how did we dress? You know, that was something somebody was telling me. They was saying how we used to get dressed – I think that people in Harlem were more concerned with dressing up than us in the Bronx, for real. Because I don't recall us –

MN: You don't recall –

DM: -- dressing, you know – I remember standing in the mirror with the girls putting on makeup, you know, but, dressing up – just to go on Boston Road, we could talk there [Laughs]

MN: At what point did you have a feeling that the Bronx was going down – that bad things were happening

DM: Never.

MN: Never. So you felt - - you never felt that the neighborhoods really deteriorated or -

DM: People tell me that I'm naive.

MN: No, but that's interesting, you're perception is it never really went down?

DM: No.

MN: Very interesting.

DM: [Laughs] I saw lot being built up that - - when the president built up the Charlotte Street area, I saw that. Yes, it's my perception, because somebody else would tell you "Ugh".

MN: But you never felt, like, unsafe at any time?

DM: Never.

MN: Are there any other things that we've talked about that you that you didn't have a chance, you know - - that you'd like to talk more about?

DM: Elaborate on.

MN: Yes. Things we missed or, experiences, positive experiences - -

DM: That club that I was trying to think of, where we went to see the performers under the Macombs Dam Bridge. We met people like Ruth Brown, Dinah Washington. We met Dinah Washington, Ruth Brown and - - oh who else did we meet there? I only remember Dinah Washington and Ruth Brown, meeting them.

MN: This is in the Bronx?

DM: No, this was in Manhattan, under the Macombs Dam Bridge. The Macombs Dam Bridge is the bridge - - 155th Street Bridge. What's the name of that place? I just said it

the other day - - somebody - - we were just talking about it. I can't recall the name of it right now.

MN: It skips my mind. It's not the Fatman by any chance?

DM: No.

MN: So it was a club across the bridge there?

DM: Yes, under the bridge.

MN: Under the bridge. So it sounds like you had a very tight-knit group of friends?

DM: Yes.

MN: And they're still- -

DM: Yes.

MN: That's terrific.

DM: Most of us live in New York. We have two in California, one in Florida, one in Pennsylvania now. That's four, and then the other four of us live here, because there's only eight of us now.

MN: Tell me a little more about how you got into jazz - - you know, and George Brath and that whole - -

DM: Well George was - - George's older brothers were into jazz. They all played - - a lot of them played instruments: saxophone, trumpet, piano. In his family they played a lot.

MN: Now what street did they live on?

DM: This is Home Street, they are Home Street people. And George would be playing at different clubs and he would tell us to come down. And what's the one that might open again, that has been closed for a long time?

MN: Not Birdland --

DM: No, no, no. Say the name, you know it, I know you know it - - I'll think of it maybe.

MN: Small's?

DM: No.

MN: The Village Gate?

DM: No, the jazz club on one hundred and - -

MN: In the Bronx?

DM: No, it's in Manhattan.

MN: In Harlem. Minton's.

DM: Minton's --

MN: Minton's --

DM: Playhouse - -

MN: Playhouse --

DM: Yes, that's the first place I think I ever went. George invited us there to play. While he was playing he invited us.

MN: And did you ever go to Club 845?

DM: Oh yes, Now what was going on there?

MN: That was a mostly - -

DM: Prospect Avenue.

MN: That was mostly a jazz club.

DM: Yes? That was jazz, mostly jazz, 845?

MN: Yes.

DM: [Belches] Oh excuse me [Laughs]. Excuse me.

MN: Did you ever see live jazz in the Bronx?

DM: See what?

MN: Jazz in the Bronx live, or mostly went to Manhattan?

DM: Manhattan, yes.

MN: Did any of your friends play musical instruments other than George?

DM: I'm thinking of all the girls now, going through them fast - -

MN: Anything else that you want to put on record?

DM: Nothing I can think of now.

MN: But you are proud to be from the Bronx?

DM: Yes I am.

MN: What do you think is the best things about the Bronx, from your - - based on your upbringing - - all the things you've seen and been through?

DM: [Laughs] I don't know the best thing about the Bronx.

MN: But you had a good experience growing up?

DM: Yes.

MN: And a good experience living here and - -

DM: Yes.

MN: Ok, well thank you very much.

DM: Ok.

[BREAK]

MN: You were saying that you really enjoyed sitting on the stoop?

DM: Yes, we did a lot of that. There was this building across from where I lived with the big concrete boards on each side, and we would sit there. And the super lived in the

building, I think he was German, and he would tell us, "Take a walk, take a walk", and he'd throw water on us to make us leave the stoop, but that's where we sat and told jokes and sang and harmonized. We used to say harmojinized [Laughs].

MN: So it was a lot on the stoop.

DM: And then we had people that would come from other areas that would sit there with us, and we would exchange jokes and songs, and mostly a lot of jokes, oh boy.

MN: Now this is an interesting question: Did - - a lot of people talk about the dozens and

DM: Oh [Laughs].

MN: Now, did the girls do the dozens as well as the boys?

DM: Oh yes.

MN: Ok. Tell me a little bit about some of the way the girls would sound on each other.

DM: Oh, on each other - -

MN: Yes, or they wouldn't do it that way?

DM: Oh we would, I guess we would. But we you just say "Ya ma". That's all "Ya ma".

"Stink Ma" [Laughter] "Ya ma, ya stink ma, ya constipated ma." [Laughs]

MN: Ok, your constipated mama.

DM: Your constipated ma [Laughs].

MN: I see. Did the boys say more; did they get more elaborate in terms of - -

DM: Playing the dozens?

MN: Yes.

DM: No.

MN: So it was just pretty much the boys and the girls together?

DM: Yes.

MN: Was that pretty much the way people grew up, with everything done together, or did the girls play certain street games and the boys others - - was it divided by gender, boys doing one - -

DM: Certain things, yes.

MN: What are some of the things that - -

DM: We played together. We played together, skelzis. That was our favorite; everybody loved skelzi.

MN: Now what about stickball?

DM: Stickball, yes. We played stickball [Crosstalk] with the broomstick.

MN: And the girls played too?

DM: Oh Yes.

MN: Did you play?

DM: Oh, I still could hit a ball.

MN : You could hit a ball [Laughs]?

DM: Oh man, you give me a bat I could hit a ball.

MN: Now, so if there were women's sports growing up you would have been --

DM: Well we had a basketball team. The girls from the Forest - -

MN: Forest Houses had a basketball - - [Crosstalk] and did you play?

DM: I played, yes.

MN: Did you ever run track?

DM: No.

MN: But you - - So if there was a softball team, like in high school, you would have played?

DM: Oh yes.

MN: Now, ok, what did the boys play that girls didn't play?

DM: I don't think they let us play marbles.

MN: Really? Ok, so you could play stickball, but not marbles?

DM: Yes. Don't touch their marbles.

MN: Don't touch their marbles [Laughter]. That sounds vaguely vulgar but - -

[Laughter]. Anything else the boys did that - -

DM: We didn't jump on - - we didn't do the jumping. You know how you make yourself go against the wall, and then somebody has to jump on top - -

MN: Oh, ring - - Johnny and the pony.

DM: Yes, only the boys did that.

MN: Now were any boys in gangs - - not on your block?

DM: No.

MN: And there weren't any tough kids that came around to your block that caused trouble?

DM: There might have been, but it was so - - I don't even remember, it might have been so low-key.

MN: It wasn't like guns or - -

DM: No, hell no.

MN: So you never grew up worried about getting shot or stabbed?

DM: No, thank god.

MN: So everybody played the dozens, everybody sounded on each other?

DM: Yes.

MN: Now, this may seem like a funny question, and I don't know if - - when rap and hip hop came out, what was - - what did you think of that? Did you ever see that as connected to the music you listened to or do you see it as something just very different?

DM: I saw it as something different, yes.

MN: You never liked it that much, or --

DM: By the way, I want to say I like what R Kelly is doing right now, in the closet [Laughter]. You know what he's doing, like a soap opera. He's singing, and he's talking about how the man comes on - - have you heard - - it's good, it's good.

MN: Anything else, you know - - was that stoop stuff was fine. Anything else you remember from those days? What about - - people talk about the grind them up dances and things like that at the - - red light, blue light.

DM: Red light, blue light. We didn't have too many of them. We had some, we played - - we had some parties like that. We had a few parties like that. Oh, sitting on the running board of Tom Dowrey's vehicle. Tom Dowrey - - the grocery, one grocery store on Home Street. And he had, oh god, it must have been a 1930-something with the running board, and we used to sit on the running board.

MN: Did he let you or - -

DM: Oh he would yell to us to get off, we'd get off, he'd go away, we'd go back again. You know how that goes.

MN: Did the boys ever used to try to ride in the back of busses and trolleys?

DM: That would be on Boston Road.

MN: On Boston Road.

DM: Yes. That was like, when we were younger, of course we weren't allowed to go up there. I never seen the boys do that.

MN: Were there trolleys in your neighborhood?

DM: Yes. Right on Boston Rd.

MN: There were trolleys that ran there?

DM: Yes.

MN: Wow.

DM: That's what I was trying to tell somebody. I used to take the trolley - - I took piano lessons for awhile, from the Bronx to Manhattan, right across the 155th Street Bridge.

MN: Do you still play piano?

DM: [Coughs] No. As a matter of fact I didn't take my lessons, foolishly did not take my lessons seriously. I used to be behind my teacher's back doing this when she was trying to teach me. That was so ignorant.

MN: Well lets stop now and then - -

[BREAK]

MN: You had mentioned that - - an expression from your childhood, "I don't feel like laughing."

DM: I don't feel like laughing.

MN: If something was funny?

DM: Very funny, yes.

MN: Are there any other characteristic expressions from the neighborhood. If somebody said that you'd say "Hey, you're from the Bronx". Ways of talking.

DM: Oh, no. When we were kids, if we wanted to ignore you, we would say "Bambi"

[Laughs]. If you talk to me, I don't want to pay you no mind, Bambi on the rooftop

[Laughs].

MN: Speaking of the rooftop, did you - - did people have parties on the roof?

DM: No.

MN: What about fire escapes, were they used at all?

DM: No.

MN: So you didn't use the roofs or the fire escapes?

DM: Mother said when we were young, we slept all night in the park, when we lived in Harlem, but I don't have too much memory of that.

MN: Did you ever go to Crotona Park?

DM: Oh yes. By the lake, they had the boats there at the time. And you know yesterday they had the Bronx reunion by there, by the lake in Crotona Park. I didn't go.

MN: So did you ever go to the Crotona Park pool?

DM: Yes.

MN: And swam in it?

DM: Oh yes, that's the first one we went - - that's the only one we went to, Crotona Park pool.

MN: What about Orchard Beach, did you ever go up there?

DM: Yes, we'd go to Orchard Beach, yes.

MN: Was this with your family, or with your friends also?

DM: We would go friends - - most of the time with my friends. With my mother, we would frequent Atlantic City beach. My mother - - we'd frequent that, Atlantic City Beach.

MN: Down in New Jersey?

DM: Yes, where they had the - - on the beach they had the - - what did you call the, the seagulls. They would always have the houses on the beach.

MN: Ok.

[END OF INTERVIEW]