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Marshall, Gloria and Marshall, Ronald

Bronx African American History Project
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Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

Transcriber: Laura Kelly

Mark Naison (MN): Hello, this is the 113th interview of the Bronx African American History Project. We're here with Ronald and Gloria Marshall at Fordham University on May 2, 2005. Now, I'd like to start by asking how your families moved to the Bronx.

Ronald, you can go first.

Ronald Marshall (RM): Okay, well, my father and mother were born in Savanna, Georgia. And they had decided when they had a migration of a lot of Southerners coming north. So they landed in Newhaven, Connecticut. And from that point that had had a more revolutionary thing going with the U.S. Postal service. They wanted more blacks in the post office - -

MN: This is in the 30's?

RM: This is in the 30's, in the 30's. So my father took the test. He passed. And he went - - he moved from Newhaven, Connecticut with his brother, Herbert - - Jake Marshall, his younger brother. And they moved to Bronx New York.

MN: Now did they move to the Bronx because they were assigned to the Bronx for the postal service or because they knew that the Bronx had good apartments and relatively cheap rents?

RM: Well what happened was they moved from New Haven because when he passed the test for the post office, the job was at the Church Street station. So that's in New York. So he moved to the Bronx.

MN: Okay, but why - - did he know anybody in the Bronx? How did he find the Bronx?

RM: Because they had sent out filers south for the migration. So the migration started from Savanna to New Haven to the Bronx, that was going on.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

MN: Now, what level of education did your parents have? Did your father have - -

RM: My father and mother met at - - they called at the time - - but it wasn't college because Georgia State College - - but they was - - like elementary but you could go up - - but they just went to high school.

MN: Right. But in those years that was more education than most people had.

RM: Believe me yes it was. And my father was a very astute student, very smart. Unfortunately he didn't attend college.

MN: Now what year did your family get an apartment in the Bronx? What year - -

RM: Well, they came in the Bronx probably in the late 30's, and they moved to 3rd avenue first. And my father, his younger brother, who was born - - their mother unfortunately died when he was born - - I mean, Jake Marshall. So, my father made sure - - the sister of my grandmother, you know my father's mother, had died - - so the sister took over. My Aunt Phyllis her name was. Phyllis McDonald. And she raised my father and my uncle. But my father made sure that my uncle took the test to be in the sanitation department. So, he went in the sanitation department, my father was in the postal.

MN: Now their first apartment was on 3rd avenue and then where did they move from there?

RM: From 3rd avenue they moved to Union Avenue.

MN: Right. Union between where and where?

RM: 166th and 167th street.

MN: Now that was - - from down the hill to up the hill.

RM: There you go.

MN: Now, Gloria, when did your family move to the Bronx?

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

Gloria Marshall (GM): Well, I was approximately at least 4-5 years old. And - - lets see I was born in '37, so that would make it early 1940. And they got an apartment in Manhattan. I don't remember the neighborhood because we were only there like a couple of months.

MN: Now where did your family originally come from?

GM: New Jersey.

MN: Okay, so you were not a southerner, you were living - -

GM: Right, no. New Jersey. And then they - - my father was working nights but he also came up to the Bronx and was referred by somebody to be a superintendent. So that's how we relocated from Harlem, I guess you would call it, to the Bronx. And it was a five bedroom apartment.

MN: Now where was this located?

GM: Franklin Avenue.

MN: Franklin Avenue and where?

GM: 167th, 168th.

MN: Oh, wow. So you were right near St. Augustine and Morris High school.

GM: I was across the street - - I was on the same side as the rectory for the nuns.

MN: Wow. Now, so it's very interesting because when people talk about how African American families came to the Bronx, one path was the postal workers and the Pullman porters and the other is superintendents. Now what other work did your father do?

GM: He was a night watchman at the First National City Bank which was later Citibank. He retired from Citibank. He went on up - - he became a chauffeur.

MN: Now, did either of your mothers work?

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

GM: Basically, my mother was a housewife. She has 8 children and in the course of raising us she had little jobs like at the supermarket and Choc Full of Nuts. That was the basis - - it was like part time.

MN: What about your mother?

RM: My mother, she was a homemaker and a nannie and a housekeeper for a family called the Seinglass and the Newman family. And that was her outside job. My father also, even though he was working in the post office - - they had a deal with - - he was the superintendent of 2 buildings. He worked two jobs.

MN: So everybody is working two or three jobs.

GM: That's right.

RM: So as time went on they moved from 3rd avenue to Franklin, I mean to Union Avenue. We lived between 166th and 167th.

MN: Do you remember the number of the building?

RM: Eleven oh six.

MN: Eleven oh six?

RM: Union Avenue.

MN: Is it still there?

RM: It's still there.

MN: Okay, so your building is still there.

RM: Still there.

MN: Is your building still there?

GM: Eleven ninety is still there.

RM: Still there.

GM: Webster Avenue.

MN: Okay.

RM: Now, my father became - - as a superintendent he had other people working for him, as superintendent, because as he got busier - - so he got free rent, right. So when we were in eleven oh six, he wasn't paying any rent, okay. Because it paid by him being a super, but he was working in the post office too.

MN: Now, what are your memories of growing - - both of you are in Morrisania, you know, and - - what was it like growing up there? What was - - you know, what are your memories of your childhood up until lets say junior high school, the elementary - -

GM: Okay...

RM: Are you going to go first, or am I going to go first?

GM: Well, it depends. Ladies first. Okay, it was a neighborhood growing up and you knew everyone. Your families met and it was large families basically because you had large apartments. And you played together, you went to school together. Whether you had a funeral or a wedding everyone was invited. The whole neighborhood was involved. You had your play time, and it was concentrated with your friends in your neighborhood. Whether you jumped rope or you went to the park. You went to the park together. If you went to Crotona Park you walked together.

MN: Now did you go to Crotona Park a great deal?

GM: Yes, yes.

MN: What were some of the things you did there?

GM: Swimming.

MN: Uh,huh, you went to the pool.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

GM: And the big play ground with the big swings [laughs].

MN: Now what elementary school did you go to?

GM: P.S. 63, which was on Franklin Avenue too?

MN: Now when you moved to Franklin Avenue was it a multi-racial neighborhood?

GM: Yes it was, yes it was.

MN: So you had people of what different backgrounds would you say?

GM: Well you had Germans, you had the Irish Americans and a few Polish, and black Americans and many mixtures [laughs].

RM: Italians.

GM: Yeah, many mixtures.

MN: And it was a workable mixture? Do you remember it as friendly - -

GM: It was friendly because even though my family was basically Protestant we were sort of involved in the Catholic Church. If we didn't go to Protestant Church my mother said go across the street to - -

MN: To St. Augustine.

GM: [laughs] - - to St. Augustine. And then she knew some of the - - what you used to call the brothers, the priests. And when my grandmother came to live with us and she was ill, they came to visit her.

MN: So they were a very community-minded group at the church?

GM: Right, right, right.

MN: Now what about your - - hold on a second.

[interruption]

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

MN: Now Ronald, what about your growing up, what was it like being a kid on Union Avenue?

RM: Well, I was born on Union Avenue on April 29th, which was just this Friday, in 1935, which makes me 70 years old as of Friday just past. And, at that time on Union Avenue - - Arthur lived on prospect Avenue. So being that our fathers were close together - -

MN: Oh this is just - - this is talking about Arthur Cryer?

RM: Yeah because that's the hookup now. When I first was about 3 years old, when I was more aware of what was going on, the only person I really knew was Arthur Cryer. So that's how [inaudible] came about.

MN: Right, now did your family - - what church did your family go to?

RM: Now, our church was the little church up the Hill on 63rd street and Eagle Avenue. Eagle Avenue - - right across from Eagle Avenue was PS 10. The church is still there. It's a storefront church. It had a potbelly stove.

MN: What was it called?

RM: Thessalonia Baptist Church - -

MN: So Thessalonia started as a storefront church?

RM: - - storefront church. That's why I'm here, because I'm going to tell you all about it.

MN: Okay, yeah.

RM: So, it there was a potbelly. So when I was very, very young, Arthur's family went to St. Augustine. The were Episcopalians - -

GM: No, Presbyterians.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: - - Presbyterians.

MN: Presbyterians, right.

RM: Okay, they were Presbyterians. Reverend Hawkins was the minister there, okay.

Now Arthur was on that side. At Thessalonia, my mother originally was in the - - actually making the church when they founded Thessalonia - -

MN: She was one of the founding members.

RM: - - founding members of Thessalonia Baptist church, before Eagle Avenue. Now what happened in 19 - - I guess it would be '41, about '40 or '41 - - yeah, '41, we decided - - they had a building fund for the church. And what they were doing - - we were giving Tom Thumb weddings and my mother was doing all types of things to create funds for the building of a new church. So this went on. We, at that time, we had been doing well, so well. My mother became the president of the pastors' aid. Reverend John was the minister in the small church. Now we moved from Eagle avenue to Thessalonia Baptist Church which was on Steppands avenue, the biggest church in the Bronx, but it was a Jewish Cathedral - -

MN: It was a synagogue.

RM: - - a synagogue.

MN: But it was a big synagogue.

RM: It was the biggest in the Bronx.

MN: That was the biggest synagogue in the Bronx?

RM: Now we marched from Eagle avenue - - now I was a little boy - - to - - there was a big day, and we moved, we marched to Thessalonia Baptist Church. The main speaker at the opening of Thessalonia Baptist Church was Eleanor Roosevelt.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

MN: [small gasp] Eleanor Roosevelt!

RM: Eleanor Roosevelt.

MN: Do you have - - does anybody have copies of that?

RM: There's documentation.

MN: That would be - - that's amazing.

RM: Eleanor Roosevelt. I was there because we marched, as little boys, we all marched on 163rd street and singing - - this is all before Martin Luther King and that whole movement - - and we marched all the way down and they had the big sermon, and then it became Thessalonia Baptist Church. Now my mother decided - - Reverend John died so we had to get a new minister. He dies in the transition between Eagle and Steppands avenue. 951 Steppands? Avenue, that's where the only Baptist church is. So my grandmother became one of the mothers of the church. And my mother decided she wanted to have a program that would benefit - - for the building fund of the church. It started in a small church then it carried over - -

[interruption]

MN: Okay, so you're saying your mother was in charge of the fund...

RM: Yeah. Well she decided that she was going to give a program that would benefit toward the building fund of the new church. So she decided - - there used to be a program called Wings Over Jordon that was on the radio - - came on Sunday. They sang spirituals. And it was very - - it became the epitome of that era. What happened was the singing was so great and was spiritual and it usually was before we went to service at Thessalonia. And my mother had the idea she was going to start something called the Marshall day- that meant my family- the Marshall day. With that Marshall day - - see I have 3 sisters.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

Evelyn was the next oldest. My oldest sister was Juanita Lewis, her married name, Juanita Marshall was her name. Juanita Marshall, then there was Evelyn Melrose Marshall, then there was Marjorie Avery Marshall. Those were my 3 sisters then one brother, Herbert Marshall Jr.- the third. I had an older brother but he died at nine months - - the first of my father's children, and he was Herbert Marshall Jr.

MN: Right. So you were saying there was going to be a Marshall day.

RM: A Marshall day. But Marshall Day was going to be - - by hearing the inspirational music from Wings Over Jordan, they all - - my sister's sang. We had - - they had music lessons, Dr. Day, who was the organist of Thessalonia, he came to our house, our apartment - - we had a seven and a half room apartment. And he came there and he gave lessons, piano lessons and music lessons. So my two sisters, Marjorie and Evelyn, took piano lessons. And my older sister was a lyric soprano. My baby sister, was next to me, was five years older, Marjorie, and was like a lyric soprano. And Evelyn - - Arnold's mother was a contralto. My brother was bass and I was a baritone, so that's where the musical came about. And we had very close friends, friends of the family. So it began - - we had - - the first of May, which is coming up soon, the first Sunday in May, we had a program called the Marshall day and it was patterned after the Wings Over Jordan and we sang all the old spirituals. And it became - - we all knew later as family reunions because all the families came from the South, they came from Connecticut up here, where my father and them lived before they moved to New York, and it became a big thing in the family. This program - - every year. Now my mother also works for the Steinglass' and the Normans - - those were two brothers and they're married. So they had one kid - - and they had a business [inaudible], it was a button factory. My older sister, Juanita, she

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

had wanted to be an artist after she graduated from Morris High school, I think in 1939, 1940 she graduated from high school. So she wanted to go to college but she took her time because things were hard so she had to go to work. So the Steinglass' owned the Button Factory - - and the buttons - - there had to be designs so my sister got involved with designing and making all the designs - - buttons were plain and then they were, okay - - so as the - - every year these programs for Marshall day grew. They grew and they grew and they grew, so it became the thing of the Bronx. And most - - everybody in the Bronx that we knew and families from the South came to this program.

MN: It was a program at Thessalonia?

RM: At Thessalonia Baptist Church. And the bulk of the money when to the building of it.

MN: So this became a fundraiser - -

RM: Fundraiser, and became the thing. Other families did things but this is what we did.

MN: Right, so there was a lot of music in your household?

RM: Very musical, everybody was musical - -

MN: Now what sort of music did your father and mother listen to? Did they have a record player in the house?

RM: Well you know, we got back to the big troller [laughs].

MN: The big troller, right.

RM: And what also they had - - little recorders. And a lot of the Marshall days were recorded. My sister Evelyn has them because my other sister died. But anyway, it was very spiritual. But my father, he was supporting his wife, my mother, and my grandmother because I spent - - when I was from 3 years old I was at Thessalonia,

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

growing up. Now from the mean time we moved from Union avenue to Franklin avenue,
that was in 1941.

MN: Franklin and where?

RM: Between 166th and 167th.

GM: That's how we met.

[laughter]

RM: That's how - - I'm coming to that now - -

[laughter]

MN: Right, okay.

RM: - - coming to Franklin Avenue. Now I lived across from 105th, I think I told you,
from the 105th regiment army.

MN: Right.

RM: You know, you come down - -

MN: I know that area very well.

RM: - - well when you come down that hill and that big - - you know before you come
down the hill on the left, it was the 590 - - 590 - - it was a big courthouse building. And
on the right side there was - - the regiment army ran around Franklin avenue. And there
was a park, a playground, a playground was there. And then you had stairs that go down.
So you go to Fulton Avenue and there's 3rd avenue. Okay, so I'm down here at 166th
street, 167th. Gloria lives between 167th and 168th.

MN: Right, okay, by the church block.

GM: Right, I was on the church block.

MN: Now did you also go to PS 63?

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: I first went to PS 23 - -

MN: Right, 23, right.

RM: - - because that was the neighborhood, because I was on Union avenue - -

MN: Right across the street.

RM: - - but when we moved, I went to PS 63. So now I graduated because I'm - - my wife - - I don't wanna give her age now, but anyway - -

GM: Well I was born in '37 and you were born in '35.

[laughter]

RM: Right, okay. So now she'll tell you. Since my birthday was just Friday [laughs]. But anyway, we knew the family because what happened was we had different friends for different things. In other words, I had friends for different things. Now on Franklin Avenue where I lived - - this is where my jazz comes into play. Across the street from me - - I lived on 1098 Franklin avenue - - across the street was 1103, and there were 2 houses, 1103 and 1109. In 1103, there was Sonny Payne, have you ever heard that name?

MN: The name sounds familiar but this is - -

RM: Well, I'm going to tell you about Sonny Payne.

MN: This is 1103 Franklin Avenue, Sonny Payne.

RM: Right. Sonny Payne was a feature drummer of Count Bassie's orchestra.

MN: Okay.

RM: He became so famous that every time Count Bassie was playing somewhere, it would say Count Bassie's band featuring Sonny Payne on the drums. Now at 10 years old, I started taking drumming lessons - -

MN: From Sonny Payne?

RM: - - from Sonny Payne.

MN: Wow.

RM: Right.

MN: The neighbors must have been happy [laughs].

RM: Of course, yeah, of course they didn't want no drums in my house. So I went across the street, across, right across. Went upstairs to their apartment. His drums would be in the living room. Ms. Payne was there and she knew - - her and my mother were very close and they all came to the Marshall day at Thessalonia. Now Sonny was a proficient of reading music. So when he started me on drums I was wanting to go in the living room and get on these big drums. He said, 'No, no you're going to start on this drumming pad. And you've got to learn to read drum music.' So this is what happened. And so I gravitated and started going up as my sisters were singing and carrying on. And what happened with Sonny, he was traveling with Count Bassie and doing very well but he would always - - just him and his mother, because his father has a name in jazz which goes way back. I'm gonna tell you what the name is and you're gonna be very very surprised- Christopher Columbus. He played with a group called Tiny Grinds.

MN: Oh! I've heard of Tiny Grinds!

RM: Well Christopher Columbus was Sonny Payne's father.

MN: Okay, because Tiny Grinds used to play at club 845.

RM: Now the 845, I'll tell you about that. My sister Juanita Marshall, she - - there's a whole lot of things that happened in between. But my older sister, she worked at a book store on Prospect Avenue called the Prospect Book Store. Well, my sister was an avid reader, you know, very intellectual, and she was very upset at the fact that she didn't go

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

to college. So, anyway, she went to work for him, Mr. Cooperman. And as years went on, the Cooperman's - - the neighbors start changing, you know. It was more Jewish oriented. We had Jewish grocery stores, and down on 3rd avenue you had the Italian deli, you had, what else? Oh, we had the Germans, the butchers. So you know, we had all different ethnic groups. And they all lived, like she said, in the same neighborhoods but we were separate but equal. In other words, there was no clashing of - - we just, we did our own thing. But we all got along. And as that happened, getting back to - -

MN: 845?

RM: - - 845. what happened was the Cooperman's wanted to - - his wife got sick. Since he knew my sister - - was working for him so long - - he made it easier for my sister to buy the store. She bought the store.

MN: She bought the book store?

RM: She bought the book store. She was the first, only black female to own a business on Prospect Avenue.

MN: Wow.

RM: Number one, the first. She turned the book store - - and you know you go to get cards at Hallmark and all that? She brought in greeting cards, Christmas cards, whatever.

MN: And what was the address of the store?

RM: The store - - the address, right offhand, I can get it later for you but I'll tell you exactly where it was. You had the _____, and when you go from the _____ going down, the store was between 166th and it went all the way to 163rd street. And the store was on Prospect avenue and there was a bar, a photography store on the corner.

MN: Yeah, I think I know where that is.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: You know where that is? Well the store was right there. She also had toys. So it became very important. In the meantime the 845 was swinging. Now all the jazz musicians that used to play - - everything is happening in Harlem - - but they all migrated to the Bronx to play at the 845.

MN: So the 845 became a really big venue.

RM: Big venue! And in the back - - it was cut off, it was intimate. You had to have an invitation to get in there, you couldn't just go in there. But in the front, where the bar is, they had tables. And bands, the bands used to be on top of the bar. Your seats are here and it ran like a platform - -

GM: Platform, it was a platform.

RM: Platform.

MN: So it was a platform?

GM: Stage.

MN: So you enter here, which side is the bar on?

RM: The bar is on the right side.

MN: The bar is on the right.

GM: And you went to the back - -

RM: And you go all the way to the back - - it's cut off by curtains. You don't go back there unless you're invited. Special invitation.

MN: Okay, and where's the stage?

RM: The stage is on top, of the bar. It goes all the way down, its on the bar - - the stage - - platform.

GM: It was more or less on the right. It was a long building.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

MN: It was a long building, okay.

GM: You go into the bar then you go to the back. Stage is on the same side of the bar but it's a partition.

MN: A partition.

GM: And then you have the tables and the chairs.

MN: Right.

RM: And in back, that's where they had intimate playing of - - you know, you give your parties there.

GM: Oh they rented it out.

RM: They rented it out.

MN: Right.

RM: So now getting back to Sonny, all his family - - I mean his mother - - they were like the elite of the family, I mean the group. But being that my mother was involved with Thessalonica with the Marshall day, that all hooked up. And I used to go with Sonny on, like say on Saturdays, when he was in town. And he would let me help him set up his drums. So I began to know jazz musicians and I was always, always around them and my mind retained all the people that I met way back then. I was like his little protégé. In the meantime, Arthur had grown and he's doing something else, which he was doing. So then what happened, the 845 and my sister's store - - was the biggest thing on Prospect avenue. You know like at Christmas time especially the store used to stay open - - people didn't get paid until Christmas eve, they didn't get all their toys. They'd come to the Prospect - - it wasn't a bookstore, it was a Prospect store. They had books that my sister also - - she did for writers that wrote books. She did, what do you call it?

MN: A book party?

RM: Book reading.

MN: Readings.

RM: Yeah, a reading. And she would be like a critic because she could speed read. And so she did it like that on the side.

MN: Now Gloria was your family musical also.

GM: No, no. We really didn't have anyone in the family that sang or played. We did have a big piano in Jersey at that time. But when we moved to New York we had to get rid of it.

MN: Now were academics stressed in your household?

GM: Yes, but we couldn't afford college [laughs]. And we all went to work and we were pushed to get as great a mark as we could so we could get a good job. I had an academic diploma but I also went to business school so I could get a business job, typing and whatnot.

MN: And what did you ultimately end up doing?

GM: Okay, I worked my way up. I just retired in 2000 from the DeWitt and Lyla Wallace Funds. They now call them the Wallace Funds. They are the originators of the Reader's Digest and they set up a funding business with all their millions - -

MN: Right, so this is investments?

GM: - - right, so I ended up there. I worked there ten years. Before that I was with Chase bank.

MN: Now going back to you know, your experience in music, did you get a chance to use your drumming skills in junior high school?

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: Well, now I'll tell you what happened. In this Marshall Day thing, we always had -
- well we had it every year and my sister was very good - - she became, at Thessalonia
Baptist Church, the assistant organist under professor Day, playing the organ and
teaching choirs and all that. And myself, I was singing in choir, I was second tenor and a
baritone. My brother way a bass. And when we were given the Marshall Day my brother
was a narrator of the Wings of Jordon. He would narrate say a passage before we sang.
And all that went on. But now getting back to - -

GM: Drums...

RM: - - huh? My drumming. What are you talking about?

GM: He wanted to know about your drumming and asked you - -

RM: Gloria I'm saying - - I'm getting ready to tell. Would you let me tell my story? See
we get into this, 44 years right?

GM: But you went off.

RM: But I went off. I'm getting back to my drumming. So I was still playing drums, but
not in junior high school, in high school. Now what happened from junior high school - -

MN: Which junior high did you go to?

RM: I went to - - first I went to PS 51.

MN: Now what street was that on?

RM: That's on the other side - - it was on - - it was down, way down - - it would be
Union and Tinton avenue with [inaudible] on the other side. I remember - -

MN: Okay, its further down South. And where did you go Gloria?

GM: I went to PS 10 on Eagle Avenue.

MN: Was that an all girls?

GM: All girls...no,no,no,no, no,no.

RM: It was all girls.

GM: It was all girls.

MN: An all girls junior high.

GM: They later made it - -

MN: And 51 was all boys?

RM: Yeah. That's why I didn't stay there. Because I didn't like an all boys school. But I had an aunt that lived on St. Paul's Place. You know Washington avenue and St. Paul's place?

MN: Yeah, down the hill.

RM: It was PS 55. So what happened, since my aunt lived down the hill there, I used her address and I transferred from PS 51 to PS 55 which was Franklin - - actually it was named after Franklin Roosevelt. Well anyway, I was in music class, and I wasn't playing any drums or anything like that. But then when I went - - I had to take a test because I actually one time I wanted to be - - I was still doing a little drumming but it wasn't prevalent because Sonny would be on the road all the time and most of my friends from Franklin avenue where Gloria lived up there, that was one group. And her brother, Irving Washington, we went to PS 63 together and that's how I knew her family.

MN: So your family name is Washington?

GM: Yes, yes.

RM: And with me living down here - - and a lot of my friends lived up there where Gloria lived. So I had a group of friends down here that was into jazz and then Gloria's family up there, we used to play stick ball in the block there, stick ball and all that. Irving

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

Washington, her brother, we were close. So I always knew the family but I never thought that I would ever marry - - you know, you say a good friend of yours in high school, you say, 'no, I'm not going to marry this one.' But anyway, as time went on I took a test, and my father was the type of man that could build and work on anything. You know radios and that type of stuff.

MN: So electronics...

RM: Yeah so, I was intrigued because he had a [inaudible] radio. And I used to look in the back of the radio with the rectified tools and all that. And I thought that little people were back there so I'd go and touch it, and [inaudible] my father would tell me. So anyway, I was very good in math when I was in junior high school. So I took a test and I passed to go to Samuel Gompers Vocational and Technical high school. So that's when I went there. I was taking a pre-engineering course. But they had a band. Now here comes the drumming, back to that. I was trying to get to that before my wife interrupted me [laughs]. I wanted to play drums in the band but they had a drummer. So I couldn't play drums. They had trombones open so I learned to play the trombone. Fortunately for me at the time I was pretty good at whatever I picked up. I could play a little piano too. So I picked up a trombone. They had a drum and bugle cor, so I went in the drum and bugle cor. I was still in the technical course but my home room was the music class. The professor or the music teacher, he ran the band and the drum and bugle cor. I played the tenor drums. Professor Bokamazza was his name. We had the greatest drum and bugle cor in the east.

MN: This was a high school drum and bugle cor?

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: A high school drum and bugle cor and the band was - - and I was in the band too but I was playing trombone. So anyway, we traveled all over the United States with the drum and bugle cor. There were four tenor drums and of course part of the band was in the drum and bugle cor. Now that's how all my musical and my drum - - I kept my drumming up but I couldn't play the main [inaudible] but I played the - -

MN: Now Gloria, you went to Morris?

GM: No, I went to Theodore Roosevelt.

MN: Oh, you went to Roosevelt? Now did many people from your neighborhood go to Roosevelt?

GM: There was - - one of the first years that they opened it up to our neighborhood and I was a group of maybe about 20.

MN: So what was that like?

GM: It was very intimidating because in one class, in more than one class, I was the only black. I got a good education though. It was a good school in those days. And I got an academic diploma. But, as I said they had just opened it up to our neighborhood.

MN: Now was it tough - - the neighborhood surrounding was a tough Italian neighborhood.

GM: Yes, yes.

MN: And was it tough for kids from Morrisania who were black going to school there?

GM: It depended. I think we stuck together pretty well. There were some nice people and some people were bad. I did have, as I was getting older, and I guess some of the fellas were trying to hit on me [laughter] - - but it was still good. I did try out for the cheering

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

squad and they didn't accept any of the blacks at that time. But they let us try out. We went through the motions and that was it.

MN: This was in the late 40's or the early 50's?

GM: Yeah in the late 40's, early 50's.

MN: Now were there ever any incidents where kids were attacked coming to and from school?

GM: I don't remember any except I heard about the gang fights. When I went to school, I went and left [laughs]. I didn't hang around.

MN: Now what about gangs, were there gangs in Morrisania?

RM: There were plenty of gangs, gangs all over. Now the reason that kept me from being in gangs, the reason I kept off it was because we had other interests and we maintained it. But we were the type of guys, coming up, that didn't take no mess. So we never got into conflicts with the other groups. They respected us, and we respected them. But the gangs were prevalent, very prevalent.

MN: What were some of the names of the gangs?

RM: The Socialistics, they had the Frenchmen.

MN: Now these were on Union and - -

RM: These were on Union and Prospect avenue and you had turf. See on 51, you had the Polish gangs, the German gangs. And when I went to 51 there weren't that many blacks going.

MN: Right so Polish and German gangs down by 51.

RM: Then by 55, that area school, were the Frenchman - -

MN: And that was a predominantly black area?

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: Over on 55 became more blacks were over there. But what was good about there was you had now your sports. There were good sports. So going back to basketball, that was the predominant thing for the black players in 55. And they had a music teacher, and we had music appreciation, and that was very prevalent. From 55, like I said, I went to Samuel Gompers. Now when I was going to Samuel Gompers and playing, and going to finish up and graduate with a technical degree - - then what happened in 1952, Arthur, he left, he didn't finish high school. So his mother - - he was having a hard time like at home and he was going to see too many John Wayne movies [laughter]. We all were going to see too many John Wayne movies. And of course John Wayne never went in no - - never went in the army nowhere, and myself and all of them. But they all were going and they all volunteered for the marines. Her brother volunteered, right? Duke volunteered. He was a volunteer.

GM: For the army not the - -

RM: For the army not for the marines. But what happened, what I'm saying there were people that would volunteer and where were they sending them? Straight to Korea. So, when I finished at Samuel Gompers I went to RCA Institute and I took up Engineering. So in the meantime the war was still going on so I figured 'heck the war will be over and I'm not worried about this.' But what happened, 1953 is when I graduated. So I figured the war was coming to an end. So here comes the beginning of '54 and I get my greeting and I went in the service. Having my background, I wanted to - - You take the tests when you first get in the service and they knew that I was pre-engineering. So I wanted to go to the signal school in Fort Mammoth New Jersey. But they sent all the black and all the people, instead of there, they sent me to the South Eastern signal school at Fort Gordon,

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

Georgia. Now I wanted to go to Georgia like a hole in the ground. They sent all the Northeasterners to South signal school in - - signal cor, that's where I did all my signal cor training. Now I'm in there, I'm in the service. Truman desegregated the services in 1947. That never happened. When I went in in 54, the service was totally still segregated. And when I got to Fort Gordon Georgia, which is in - - we called in *disgusta* Georgia [laughter] not Augusta. That's where James Brown was from. And on 9th and Quinet street on the weekends we had the shoot outs. And all the soldiers from the Fort would come into town. They had a club called the Paramount club. And James Brown owned all the radio stations and stuff in there and there was a big Taxi stand and you partied. But if you got caught after 12 o'clock, black soldiers, they would arrest you and call the Fort. Then the MP's would come and get you and take you, beat you up for being caught after 12 o'clock and take you back to the thing. But anyway so what happened when I was in - - I finally, after I finished all my training at southeastern signal school, everybody got orders to go to Shape? Headquarters in Paris, you know for my electronic stuff. It turned out I had no orders to go nowhere. So I'm saying so what the heck's happening with me? What happened was, they decided to send me to school to continue my education, my college. So I went to the, to learn, to start teaching and I was teaching there at southeastern Signal School. I was teaching switchboard maintenance because I learned all about switchboards and my radio, radio communications. And I did that there until finally, they finally gave me my MOS in Korea. I got orders, there was only one guy on it, me, and I had to report to Korea by myself. And I came home - - now by this time me and Gloria - - her mother and father - -

[END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A]

[BEGINNING OF TAPE 1 SIDE B]

MN: So the two of you are going together while you're in the service, and Gloria's family is starting to go to Thessalonica.

RM: And then her father ended up being, you tell it.

GM: A scout leader, my mother became an usher.

MN: At Thessalonica? So they joined and became very active and influential in the church.

GM: Right, right. And then just before he went overseas, we got engaged.

MN: What was the church like in the 50's? How would you describe the atmosphere there?

RM: I can explain it, because I was involved.

GM: But I went too.

RM: But that was later. I had been there since I was 3 years old. She came only after - -

MN: It's interesting to also hear how somebody who didn't know it - -

GM: Right.

RM: Well what happened was, my grandmother was the predominant - - my grandmother didn't finish high school but she was an articulated lady that could stand and speak and you would think she had a doctor's degree. And she took me under her wing. So since I was three years old, I was at Thessalonica Baptist church.

MN: And what about Reverend Polite?

RM: Well now I'm getting to Reverend Polite. Since my mother was the president, he ate his first meal in our house. And so he became so close because my mother - - you

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

know, when you're president of the pastor's aid you make sure that everything is right for Reverend Polite.

MN: Now where did he come from, where - -

RM: He lived in Manhattan.

MN: Okay now where did they recruit him, how did - -

RM: Well they had what they call a committee of the deacons, they went to his church in Manhattan. That's when they finally picked him. And then, like I said, he came to Thessalonica but then his first meal, Reverend James A. Polite, was in our house. So he had been very close with our family.

MN: This is when you were living on Franklin?

RM: On Franklin Avenue.

MN: Now how many people would come to church on the biggest Sunday services?

GM: Okay, it used to be full downstairs - -

RM: And upstairs.

GM: - - and the balcony would then be opened after they filled up all the seats and it would be front and center. It was full, especially on - -

MN: Would you say a thousand people?

RM: Yeah.

GM: Well maybe 800.

MN: Eight hundred? But that's still a lot.

GM: That's still a lot of people. And you have your different singing groups, and then the Reverend would get up and give his ministry. It was a long day [laughs].

MN: What made Thessalonica the most popular church in the neighborhood?

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: What made it was - - see Gloria didn't go that much. I'm gonna tell you like it is.

She did not go, I was there all the time from morning until night.

MN: [laughs]

RM: Gloria didn't go like that. So I was there. So I know exactly what went on at Thessalonia. Reverend James A. Polite, he was a very intriguing minister. And he was close to families at that time. The church, especially on - - they had like different facilities, they had a junior choir, and a senior choir and all the choirs. And the church - - you know that's a cathedral - - the place there was Jewish or - - it was huge. The upstairs, the downstairs - - then they had a downstairs, they had a junior church downstairs.

Before, when they had the cub scouts, I was in the cub scouts. They didn't have cub scouts in Thessalonia, they didn't have no scouting at all. But the first cub scouts I was in, this is before we get involved. Then I wanted to be a boy scout. So there was no boy scouts in Thessalonia. So I went to St. Augustine where Arthur was and his father was involved with the running of - -

MN: Of the boy scouts there?

RM: - - there, yeah.

MN: Was Reverend Hawkins and Reverend Polite, did they work together or was there tension between them?

RM: No, here's what it - - Reverend Polite became the senior guy there. Reverend Hawkins was very scholastic and all that but he was like junior to Reverend Polite. Reverend Polite became the minister in the Bronx. He became it. And all the other churches, whatever they are, they had a coalition between St. Augustine and they were like little satellites. But they all gave homage to Reverend James A. Polite running the

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

biggest Baptist church in the Bronx. So all the churches on Washington Avenue, on Third Avenue, or wherever, in Manhattan, they all came to Thessalonica. That was the biggest church there was in the Bronx. Now getting back to what we said about the 845. I'll tell you about the clubs that were on - -

MN: Okay, I have to ask you one question before this. Do you remember something called the McKinley theater?

GM: Yes, yes.

RM: Oh, now, now. Can I answer because Gloria didn't go to those places at that time?

[laughter]

GM: Oh, god.

RM: McKinley - -

MN: What street was it on?

RM: - - McKinley's on Boston Road.

MN: The McKinley theater was on Boston Road - -

RM: Yeah because it was named McKinley Square.

MN: Okay.

RM: Now that was a slave market, years back, McKinley Square. Now McKinley, they had a bar downstairs. My sister Evelyn was married - - her reception was upstairs. They had a ballroom upstairs.

MN: Okay, because somebody said - - so this, the McKinley theater, was this a movie theater?

RM: They had a movie theater on the other side. There was a movie theater there, and there was a place - - they had a McKinley ballroom.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

MN: Okay, so this was the McKinley - - there was a McKinley ballroom - -

GM: That had dances and parties.

MN: - - and also you had events there. Okay because somebody said that Mary Lou Williams performed.

RM: Yeah Mary Lou Williams and all them type - -

MN: Now did they perform at the theater or at the ballroom/

GM: At the ballroom. There was no actual theater.

RM: There wasn't a theater. It was - -

MN: It was called the McKinley ballroom.

GM: Right.

RM: McKinley ballroom. That's where my sister had her wedding reception.

MN: Okay, right. Now how long was that open until? Did that stay open for quite a while?

RM: Well it stayed open until the neighborhood had started changing because - - you know why it started changing? Because people started moving.

MN: Right, okay so that was on McKinley square?

RM: Right.

MN: Now going back to all these clubs. There was 845, there's the Hunts point Palace.

RM: Hunts point Palace.

MN: Now were you married at the Hunts point Palace?

GM: We had a reception there. We were married at Thessalonia.

MN: You were married at Thessalonia and then your reception at Hunts point Palace.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: Hunts point Palace. Now the guys that played at my reception, I'll tell you about them. Now these are the groups that I was hanging out with. I mean these are the guys - - they were my guys. You had Sonny Johnson. You had Franshad Turner, he played bass. Sonny, he played alto. You had Beeno Oliver who played trumpet. And you had Howard Beach who also played drums. Now this group, they all played for our wedding reception. Now Beeno Oliver, he was so good that when Jerry Mulligan, you remember who Jerry Mulligan is? Okay, and he had Ched Baker and they made 'Walking Shoes' and 'Sore shoes' and all those records. And Ched Baker was a top trumpeter. Well he got on drugs, Ched Baker, and he went to Europe and they say as an accident he fell off a wall and died. So Jerry Mulligan needed a trumpet player. So Beeno Oliver became the trumpet player.

MN: Now was he from your neighborhood?

RM: We all grew up together. That's why they played at my, you know.

MN: Right. So how many people were at the reception would you say?

RM: When what - -

GM: Our reception-it was over 100.

MN: Right.

RM: Gloria please it was much more than that.

GM: Alright well I said over 100.

RM: Jesus Christ, it was like 200 almost.

MN: So the Hunts point Palace was the place where you had events as well as concerts?

RM: Yeah, and you had a lot of Latin American - -

MN: Now did you guys get into Latin music?

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: Oh now that's something else. Now Dizzy Gillespie, when he went to Cuba, now Gloria doesn't know this because - - she got in this because of me, not because she knows - -

GM: Excuse me. I used to go dancing with my girl friends. I used to go to the Palladium. That was not with him.

RM: Oh yeah, but that was before we hooked up. Now here's the thing, whenever they went out, in our group, whenever they went anywhere, because they were on the block, we made sure that they got home. You know why? Because here's what people from our block - - because when you go to these affairs, you got people that come from Brooklyn, from all over, so we wanted to look out for the groups. And what happened was when Dizzy Gillespie came back from Cuba, he brought Juano Tuzo, who played congas. And Dizzy made montega. And then all the Latin jazz, afro Cuban music. Now all the clubs in the Bronx, they used to have you know Cuban and jazz, they all mingled, interchanged.

MN: Right. Now did you ever go to the Tropicana Club?

RM: Tropicana? Yeah. That Tropicana used to be - - she didn't go.

MN: You went to the Tropicana?

RM: Oh of course. Because see at the time, when we weren't there, we were at the other jazz clubs. But the music was so - - we all loved dancing. Our group - - the fellas. We went everywhere. Manhattan and the Bronx. We didn't go to Brooklyn. So the clubs on there - - there's Goodson's, down toward that, Goddson's there - - Arthur Boeey is his name, he played organ. And they had shows, you could eat down at Goodson's. Then they had Freddy's. You heard about Freddy's?

MN: Sure.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: Yeah, well that was Freddy Cole's. That was Nat King Cole's brother.

MN: He owned it?

RM: No, no. He worked there. He worked there and he sang, and everybody was so happy - - because they called him [inaudible].

MN: So he was - - Nat King Cole's brother used to perform there?

RM: Every weekend. Every weekend.

GM: There was another Latin place around the corner from McKinley. It was called the Royal Mansion.

MN: The Royal Mansion.

RM: The Royal Mansion was the main thing - -

GM: You had all the Latino dancers there. You had Machito, Tito Puente, ChiChi Rodriguez.

MN: And this was on McKinley Square?

RM: Right, you had all this - -

GM: It's all in the same neighborhood. It's like around Boston Road leading into Franklin.

MN: Okay, now were there any Puerto Rican families living in Franklin Avenue?

RM and GM: Not for a while.

MN: Okay, so the groups were coming up from below, from Hunts point, up to the Royal Mansion.

RM: There you go.

MN: And were people from the neighborhood, African Americans, also going to those dances?

GM: Yes, yes.

RM: Right.

MN: So it was like a melting pot of - -

RM: A melting pot and once establishes - - you know because there's always been this dissension among the dark skinned Puerto Ricans and the light skinned Puerto Ricans.

And then when they didn't know their heritage, they all came from Africa and it doesn't matter where they plot you down at. So once that melting pot came in that's when - - music is the thing that brought us all together. We started from Africa.

MN: Right, right. And the African polyrhythm were very much in the Latin music even more than in the - - the congas and the hand drums.

GM: That's right, yes.

RM: And the thing about it now, here's what happened. On Monday nights they had jam sessions at Birdland, okay. Me and our fellas, my fellas from her, up where she lived, and myself and a couple of others, we used to go to Birdland all the time. We were young kids, I was like 15 years old. We get in there anyway. I used to get in there when I was going to high school because I would take my trombone down there. And since Beeno was with me, who end up playing, and Artie - - so we'd get in free. And you heard Parker, you heard Getts - - well now Getts - -

MN: Is from the Bronx.

RM: - - well you know Getts came along, I'm going to tell you, you ever heard of the three o'clock highs? You ever heard of that?

GM: That was in Manhattan.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: Gloria, now can I tell it. Are you gonna tell it or am I gonna tell it? Am I gonna tell it?

GM: Mm, hmm.

RM: Okay. The three o'clock highs came about, it was at the Rockland Palace, 105th street - -

MN: Yeah, I know where that is.

RM: Okay. Well every Sunday for three o'clock, all of the jazz musicians that were in town performed there. That's the first place that Stan Getts was presented.

MN: Was at the Rockland Palace, at the 3 o'clock - -

RM: The Rockland Palace, the three o'clock highs.

MN: Now did Stan Getts ever play at 845?

RM: He was up there, he was at the 845. He was everywhere around. But since, unfortunately, like with all - - they all had habits, they all - -

MN: They got into the heroin - -

RM: - - the heroin. They got that way and a lot of times - - at Birdland, there was a tunnel that ran right next to the bar right next door and that's where all the communications were.

MN: Now was there a lot of heroin in the Bronx also?

RM: That was it, that was it. There was a lot of heroin, it was heroin addicts. Most of the musicians were you know - -

MN: How old were the two of you when you first became aware of heroin, what about you Gloria?

GM: I would think - -

RM: She can only speak for herself now.

MN: Well that's what I'm asking [laughs].

GM: Well when you used to go to parties you would see the fellas go outside. Some of them were just smoking. Then as time went on, you noticed some of them sleeping and nodding all the time.

MN: Now this was in the early 50's would you say?

GM: Right, so I would be aware there was something more drastic going on. And then it came about after a while that you knew what parties not to go to [laughs].

MN: And what about you, when did you become aware of it?

RM: You know, I was aware of it almost from infancy because I was around it all the time. Gloria was not around it at all and the guys were smoking pot - -

GM: That's what I just said.

RM: Would you listen to me now? They were smoking pot, they were snorting cocaine and all. A lot of the guys didn't want a main line. They used to call it skin popping, you heard that term?

MN: Yeah.

RM: Skin popping. So they figured well if they skin popped, then they won't get addicted. We used to be at affairs, the guys would go out, they go in the hall and they skin pop. And after they skin pop, then they get - - see I'd look at them - - I drank. I'd have a drink and I'd say, 'Man, I don't like doctors giving me a needle so why am I gonna start doing all that?'

MN: Right, right.

RM: So I was around it all the time but my main thing was the music.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

MN: Now when you came back from the service, did you decide - - what career did you decide to do?

RM: Okay. Now, can I tell now? Can I tell it? Okay. When I came back - - when I got out of the service in '56, I went back to RSCA in suit for a while, but I switched because I didn't get a certificate at RSCA. I wanted to get a diploma in engineering. So I went there. But in the mean time, I went to work in 1956. This was the first real job I had working for - - you know Avery Fisher? Well he's the one that discovered - - at Lincoln's Square they have Avery Fisher hall.

MN: Oh, Avery Fisher.

RM: Avery Fisher. Well he invented high fi.

MN: Oh, okay.

RM: Okay? So I went - - I took a test at his facility on 44th drive, it was in Queens, that's where his factory was. He manufactured custom made units. And he needed technicians. I became - - working there. I was there when we got married. I worked there 5 years. So what happened - - I was going there and going to school. And what happened - - he used to bring engineers from Germany and he would set them up for one year. They would design new sets for him and we were the ones that tested all the sets out upstairs in the test department and then they would go downstairs and be put in boxes. They were custom made and they were the best because he was the one that invented it. And I worked there 5 years. And then after that, I was still going to school but we were married - - we got married in 1957. Then I was doing a lot of contracting work. I was working for design engineers. And what we did - - we would go in to different places. When Shepard

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

went up, straight up, what we did, we made all the signal tracking equipment for him to go up.

MN: Right, now where did you get your first apartment when you got married?

GM: Well it was on Washington Avenue.

MN: Between where and where?

GM: One hundred and - -

RM: Sixty ninth.

GM: - - sixty ninth, one hundred seventieth. The L was right around the corner.

MN: Now was this in a private building?

GM: That was in a private building and then the site of that apartment complex - - they were going to build housing projects, where the housing project is now.

MN: Right, the Claremont Houses.

GM: Right. And when they notified all the tenants and they gave you so much money to relocate, we moved to Water Avenue in the Bronx which is across town.

RM: 1028 Water Avenue.

GM: 1028.

MN: Water Avenue...

GM: Off of - -

RM: Off of Bruckner Boulevard.

GM: - - Bruckner Boulevard. There was a lot of Jewish people over there at that time.

RM: Hardly any blacks.

GM: It was a mixture over there. A private house.

MN: Okay so you bought a private house?

GM: No, no. We lived - - we were upstairs.

MN: You lived in a private house and is that the place you stayed for a while?

GM: Yes, and then when our family was grown, we had two daughters and I was pregnant with the third child, we - - because we dislocated from a site of the projects, we were one of the first to move in the McKinley projects because we had preference. They opened it up to Veterans first - -

RM: Only, only, only blacks.

GM: - - and being that we were moved from that site - -

MN: Now the McKinley Houses were on what street?

GM: One hundred sixty third - -

MN: Right, right across from...

GM: Forrest Houses.

MN: - - Forrest Houses and right across from and what it that, that later development, Woodstock Terrace.

GM: Woodstock Terrace.

MN: And right near Johnson's Barbeque.

GM: Right, absolutely.

RM: Woodstock Terrace actually was a part of McKinley.

GM: They separated it.

RM: They just separated because it was only 2 buildings and you got a Terrace there.

The rooms are basically just the same.

MN: Now how long did you live in McKinley Houses?

GM: We lived there until we moved to Fordham Hill in '89.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

MN: Now what year did you move into McKinley?

GM: Let's see, Tracy was - - '62.

MN: Okay so you were in there from '62-'89?

GM: Right.

MN: Now those were years of transition and change in that community.

GM: Yes, absolutely.

MN: So what was it like bringing up children when all of those things were going on?

GM: First of all, the two oldest daughters, I had sent them to a school in the upper Bronx. They were accepted - - PS eighty something, which was a very good foundation for them. And then they came back to the neighborhood and went to the junior high school, then they picked their high school after that. They had no problems. The two youngest ones I had put in St. Peter and Paul parochial school - -

RM: We had put.

GM: - - down the hill. Then I went to work. I didn't have to be to work until like 11 o'clock because I used to take them to school. And it worked out very well.

MN: Did the neighborhood ever get dangerous?

GM: After a time it did. In fact, I would say, there came a point when we took a vacation and we took the kids and we went somewhere. We liked to leave very early in the morning so no one would see us leave [laughs]. And come back. Because there are the gangs and then the drugs and the robberies and all that that went with it [laughs].

RM: Now let me tell you something in reference to that. See I shield my family. I knew all the gangs and stuff. Nothing would happen with my family because they knew the group that I was with. And that group, we were solid, together. We had our brothers'

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

groups, the gangs, that anything they started they knew that anything they started, the gangs that lived there, they would have retributions for that. So there was never no problem there with her or with any of the other parts because - -

MN: Now this was other men in the buildings or - -

RM: Well there were guys in there that were using drugs and the neighborhood changed where they started using - - in fact, before I went to Korea a lot of guys that decided that they wanted to get off, they went into the service. And a lot of them got killed during the Korean war because the 24th infantry division was basically all black. That was the first division in Korea. But I was in the 24th signal cor, so it was a difference for me. But anyway, what I'm saying is that, when I came back from Korea, there was so much drugs. That was in '56. And especially in the music world. Drugs were prevalent - - another tenor player who played with everybody, he's in the big jazz - - I have a big jazz book-encyclopedia. Whenever we go away to hear somebody and I see an old timer or I see a guy in a medium sized - - if he's not in that book, then he hasn't played [inaudible]. So what happened Tina Brooks - -

MN: Oh yeah!

RM: You've heard of Tina Brooks?

MN: Yeah.

RM: Well Tina Brooks, that's how you know when he dies because he got Bobbie Turner on drugs, he got Tina Brooks on drugs. In other words they were - -

MN: Who got those guys on drugs?

RM: Tina Brooks.

MN: Tina Brooks got a bunch of people on drugs?

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: Yeah, these are the guys that played at my wedding. Tina Brooks played at my wedding, our wedding.

GM: No, I don't think he did.

RM: He did. Gloria he played - - I'm gonna go along with you. But anyway, Tina, Bubby, and like I said, Vino - -

MN: Now were there after hours spots - -

RM: There were after hours spots. They had them at Goodson's, they used to have a lot where you'd play - - even at the Hunts point Palace, the Royal Mansion - - you know where you had Latin jazz and all that - - and even on Westchester avenue there was a club, a Hispanic club. And there was a boxer, his name is Willie. He fought. He was a light heavyweight, I mean a lightweight. And what happened, he opened up a club. He was a champion, I can't remember his name right now. But anyway he fought Willie Papton and all that, I'm not talking about Sandy _____ - -

MN: Not Willie Pastrano?

RM: No it was a Spanish guy. Lopez, something like that. But anyway, at these clubs, like I said when we were going to Birdland on Wednesday, we went to the Spanish place, what's the name of the other place?

GM: I wasn't with you [laughs].

RM: No, no, you were with me then, no, no. Wednesday we went to the Palladium.

GM: I didn't go with you. I said that before, I went to the Palladium, I told him that.

RM: Yeah, yeah. But see you didn't go with me - -

MN: Okay, so there were after hours spots where people - - and there'd be more drugs there?

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: Oh there'd always be drugs, always. Because what they would do, when they would take intermissions, they would go and do what they gotta do. And that went on - - that was just basic.

MN: So Franklin Avenue in the mid 50's, a lot of the guys were addicted?

RM: Yeah, that's why so many died and like Tina. He died and when I came back he didn't last - -

MN: Yeah, yeah. Now when the McKinley houses, when you moved in, were most of them two parent working families?

GM: Well they had to be veterans.

RM: You had to be veterans.

GM: So your veterans were the men, basically. So the families moved in and they stopped at - - I think, it was going into our 8-10th year there - - you noticed a change.

MN: So you had different type of families moving in - -

RM: Moving in.

GM: That's right. But they were very strict when we moved in.

MN: Right, it was very strict. Was it well kept?

GM: Well kept.

RM: Well Kept. It was beautiful. We had tenant patrols, we had everything.

MN: So when did things start becoming more difficult in the tenant houses themselves?
In the 70's or earlier?

GM: It was definitely 70's.

RM: Seventies. Late seventies, early eighties.

MN: So it held up very well, it was a good place to live?

GM: Right.

RM: I'd just like to, at this point - -

GM: It was very well run. It was a group of us that were friends. We babysat for each other - -

MN: Uh, huh. Everybody looked out for each other's kids.

GM: - - and then you started getting the strangers in. When I say strangers they were not - -

RM: Yeah, part of the elite group.

GM: - - I don't mean to say it like this, but they were not of our caliber.

MN: Right. Is this because, were they more the single parent families - -

RM and GM: Yes.

MN: - - or just different cultural values.

GM: Different cultural - - they didn't, they were more wealthier. Because went we went in you went - - no one was unwealthier.

RM: Everybody worked, everybody worked. But like I said, it was beginning to be - - and when it was [inaudible] they started raising your rent, they actually want you out. Anybody that was doing well they wanted to move.

MN: So they tried to push the families out?

RM: I used to go down to management all the time. 'Mr. Marshall, I know you came here when it was real good, but...' I said, 'I'm moving when I'm ready. You're not kicking me out. Because I was here, I'm a veteran, that's why this place was built.' But anyway, finally when things with our guys, friends of mine, they bought big houses in Long Island and all that sort of stuff when the migration went to Long Island. But I didn't

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

do that because I wanted to - - my wife didn't drive. And I didn't want to move, as we got older, I didn't want to move out into the suburbs where I had to see that she got into town and then after - - with me working, I was working all over the place. So I decided that - -

GM: We would just wait until kids - -

RM: - - at that time we were just waiting for the kids to get out - - to go through school and college, and then we decided we were going to move.

MN: Right, okay. And do your daughters live in the metropolitan area?

GM: Okay, we have 2 daughters that live in New York. One is in the Bronx, one is in Brooklyn. Our oldest daughter is in Atlanta, Georgia. When she married, she relocated with her husband. My son is in the Bronx.

MN: Now did your children - - did you still remain in Thessalonia when you were living in McKinley Houses?

GM: Yes we did. I would say up until the time we moved to Fordham Hill we did go back and forth to Thessalonia. Once we got here we more or less sort of strayed away from the church.

MN: Right. Now how was your feeling about the public schools in the Bronx for your kids? Do you feel they got a decent education?

GM: At that time they did and we did definitely.

RM: Our kids did. See what it did - - originally my baby son and who else, oh he went to Catholic school, we sent him to Catholic school. He got a good education and my - -

GM: They all did, they all did.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: Uh, huh, they all did very well. That was the latest time that things were going good, really good. And that was my main thing was to try to give my kids - - and they all know, in that particular area, you know it gets to be a thing - - certain people, they look at out of the group. Now they always knew the Marshall's because I kept a tight knit on them because I had the key to the outside world, to knowing what was going on and everything and they always respected me.

MN: Now did you do actual - - is this more through informal activities or did you do youth work in the neighborhood as well?

GM: Now I didn't do any youth neighborhood - -

MN: But how did you - - you knew people, but were you active in local organizations?

RM: I was strictly then still in Thessalonica. I was singing in the choir and those things and then doing the jazz things that was - -

MN: Okay so you were still playing on the side?

RM: Yeah, yeah.

GM: Okay, I was active with the PTA.

MN: PTA. Okay now where were you - - in what context were you playing music? Was this - - were you playing at clubs, were you playing at weddings?

RM: Well see what happened was I wasn't playing any more because - - but what was happening was that everything that I did - - we also, during this period when we got involved, was established - - called the Secret Pal Club. The Secret Pal Club was basically a club that was formulated when it was just guys in it and there was no women in it. And it was from the church, and afterwards we would socialize and things of that

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

nature. And it was very nice. And then it started broadening. And then they started bringing in the wives of the guys and so we formulated - - called it the Secret Pal Club.

MN: The Secret Power Club?

GM: Secret Pal, P-A-L.

RM: Secret P-A-L.

GM: What happened is they used to go to choir rehearsal. And the guys would stop afterwards for a drink. So basically what happened - - the bar started to change, the neighborhoods were changing, so they would go to someone's house.

MN: Right because the bars were not safe - -

RM: No we didn't go there.

MN: Now what years did the bars become unsafe would you say, 70's?

RM: It was late 70's, early 80's. Late 70's, early 80's.

GM: So the bar started making collations, you know little sandwiches - -

RM: Started out small, it got bigger.

GM: - - so they could have a drink and a sandwich and go home [laughs]. So then we mushroomed until we called ourselves a secret pal where we had our meeting once a month on the weakened.

MN: Now one of things is that, you know, in the 60's and 70's there were the fires and the arson and all that, and what was your feeling when you saw like that kind - - you know, neighborhoods you lived in - -

RM: Okay, go like that. But also during that period, my sister's store that had been presently been going very well, it changed again, the neighborhood. So therefore, then

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

my sister gave up the store. So what happened, they put women on the, was it George Washington?

GM: Yeah, because they were burning down neighborhoods.

RM: Okay, so they were burning down neighborhoods because a lot of people wanted to get insurance [inaudible]. So anyway, my sister applied for a job - - they started putting females. So she was the first one to go on the bridge.

MN: On the George Washington Bridge?

RM: Yeah. And then she became the supervisor and trained people, and everybody out there - -

MN: Wow. Now Thessalonia - - after the fires sort of eased off, Thessalonia then became very involved in rebuilding.

RM: Yes, well that was part of all going back to where my Marshall day, that all was in that package which we had planned all through the years when we got to Thessalonia to but all the property around and across the street, they got a parking lot, and extra building, that was all part of the mix.

MN: Yeah. Because Thessalonia helped rebuild the neighborhood, still involved in it.

RM: That's it, that's it. But then Reverend Polite died, right. You know the street that's named Stephan's avenue - -

MN: Yeah, is Reverend Polite street.

RM: And the minister that - - we had to try out for ministers for over a year, until now they got - -

GM: Reverend Shelly Samson.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: Dr. Shelly Samson. But his - - for me, he didn't fit the mold for me. We were going through a lot of transitions and a lot of things were going on so I decided - - and then my mother, everybody had died, a lot of the members had died, the people that actually - - the reason why that church was there had died. So I said, 'I need to go somewhere else.' So being that my daughter lives in Atlanta we go there all the time, every year we go.

GM: But we go to Riverside Church.

MN: Oh, which is a wonderful place.

RM: Well, I decided that we were going to join Riverside. I used to take her to Riverside. And I said to my wife, I said, "Listen, I'm not asking you to join the church now, but maybe in the future." I had gotten sick and I was in the hospital. She didn't tell you that.

GM: I was going to say that. I was saying when he came home and he wanted to go to church, I suggested 'Let's go to Riverside.'

RM: [sighs]

GM: And I took him down there one Sunday - -

RM: See now she's talking.

GM: - - and then we [inaudible] now we can join. It's a place where we go and sign up and I said 'Do you wanna go here?' And he said, 'yes'.

RM: Gloria, why are you saying that you took me. You never took me - - we used to sing - - Thessalonica, Thessalonica - - listen - - Thessalonica Church - - we used to - - the choir, we had a beautiful choir. We used to sing at Riverside.

MN: Right. Now what is Dr. Sampson's difference in style between Reverend Polite and

- -

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: Well, okay. I guess she's gonna talk about it, I'm gonna talk about it.

GM: I haven't talked about - -

RM: Reverend Sampson - - Baptists have a charter, Catholics have a charter, every church has a charter, and your supposed to adhere to that charter because of the deacon and the board of trustees, they're the ones that the, you know, that the church is run on. He tries to flip-flop in between all these different - - sometimes he tries to act Catholic. Sometimes he tries to act like he's a faith healer. Sometimes - - now I don't wanna be involved with nobody that's going all that type of ways. I told my wife that I'm not going there no more. And since there was nothing there for me no more. And I know we had been singing at Riverside before Dr. Forbes who is the minister there now. That was way before, that was Rockefeller's place, Riverside. But when Dr. Forbes came there and I had been sick, and I had been in the hospital and I told Gloria that we were gonna start going to Riverside. And I said we're not going to join right now, we're going to wait until you felt comfortable. When she went there she started feeling more comfortable and Dr. Forbes is the type of a minister that is worldly. His intellect - - the other, he had it but it was marginal. He wasn't a part of the inner group. And he was doing too many things as far as I was concerned because I had been in church all my life. So we had been very involved in Riverside. And of course right next to it is Grant's tomb, which they had jazz in there. On Franklin avenue again there was a liquor store right on 168th street, right. And there was this guy working in there. You ever heard of Sam Bailey? Well Sam Bailey became the drummer that play with Brewback?; he was his drummer. Well he played drums back then but he didn't play with the big guys then. But he had been doing that on the side but he was working in the liquor store. Well Sam Bailey - - first, Billy

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

Taylor started the jazz mobile, Billy Taylor. And after Billy Taylor left Sam Bailey became the Stilts to this day. You know, you've been down to Grant's tomb? Yeah well when that first started and all the musicians from the Bronx, from all over, they were all around. But getting back to what happened, my - - somebody from the - - our complex had sent our name to Norwood, you tell about that - -

GM: [laughs] I just brought it, he can look at it.

RM: No I want you to read it.

GM: I'm not going to read the whole thing.

RM: I'm not saying you to read it - -

MN: It's, oh, the Norwood News.

RM: Yeah, well that's us, that's why I wanted you to read it.

MN: Okay, this is - - oh so, can I have this?

GM: You can have that.

MN: This is great.

RM: That's why I, she didn't - -

MN: It's how you ended up at Fordham Hill and - -

RM: She didn't want me to bring it at first. I told her we should bring all that, I wanna show you all that.

MN: Oh, this is great. Well, anyway, this - - I mean to me it's sort of fascinating that you had - - you brought up four children in a neighborhood that many people gave up on. You had this powerful church, and this community, and you made it work.

GM: Yes.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: And all during the time now when Arthur was coming up the other way with rhythm and blues, we had, you know, lost contact and Arnold, my nephew - - and in the month of April, unfortunately, it was a very sad month in a way, even though at the end of the month was my birthday - - because his birthday was the first of April. And I used to - - I told my wife, 'Yeah well it's Arthur's birthday...' and he didn't make, he just made it to 69, because he dies in July. But I found out in September that he has died because we lost contact. He had moved to North Carolina and he moved - - he was with Motown for two years - -

MN: Yep, and then he came back to Tremont.

RM: Yeah, to Tremont.

MN: To the Phipps houses.

RM: But he used to be in 99, he started out you know, in the school band there.

MN: In those talent shows in PS 99.

RM: Well see, when he was doing that, that's when I was with, doing things with the jazz things. So we were doing different things. His wife, and hour before he left to go to Pittsburg on Friday, called me on my birthday because he was going to Pittsburg to a sorority thing. And he told me unfortunately that Arthur's wife died. That her funeral is tomorrow, Tuesday. Well you know that because you sent that out - -

MN: Yeah, I sent it out to everybody because - -

RM: Yeah, but in the meantime, I had my cousin died, this one. Then her sister's son died two weeks later. And then my daughter, her mother-in-law is gravely sick. This all happened just last month. So it's been real sad but then my wife - - I didn't know about

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

this. She decided to give me a surprise birthday affair which happened, what was it,

Friday or Saturday?

MN: Wow, okay.

RM: And my daughter came up from Atlanta, which I didn't know she was coming. And we had a nice - -

GM: We had dinner at Carmine's.

RM: We had all there. Then she said that's not all that's gonna happen.

MN: Now where's Carmine's located?

GM: There's one at 90 and 91st and Broadway.

MN: Oh, okay.

RM: So we had a full group. That was just a little half of the family, that wasn't all because we got a huge family. So being that, god willing, in two more years, we will be celebrating our 50th wedding anniversary.

MN: Wow, that's wonderful.

RM: So I don't have many friends that are even alive or some of my friends have been married 5 times and they want to know how did I stay married all this long because even with the way, how we communicate - - see, we're not fighting, this is how we stay together.

GM: [laughs]

MN: Right, now I can - - if you saw me and my wife [laughs].

RM: [laughs] But I must say this, when - - you know what I'm gonna talk about? When all my friends - - and being friends with her brother - - and my wife decides - - she told me this later. You know, naturally guys go all around the way to meet girls and I had

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

never thought about any interaction with Gloria. So Gloria told - - now you tell him what you said about me in reference to the rest of my other friends. Like Tina and - -

GM: Well especially when you went in the service, but I knew it before then. I was home, I saw them in action.

RM: I was away.

GM: And he was away. There's a lot of things he doesn't even know that I know. And before that I had already knew that he was the best of the group [laughs].

MN: Right. That he was the responsible one - -

GM: Right [laughs].

MN: - - and the one who wasn't going to go off the deep end because there are a lot of guys who are on the edge.

GM: Yes.

RM: And they couldn't, they could not - - you know, there was a movie, I don't know if you heard of it, it was a black movie, and there was a guitar player called 'Crossroads.' He played jazz guitar, old timer. And you know what happens in life how you veer off on detours. And the purpose of it was, when you veer back to that right road - -

MN: Yeah. I mean its interesting because I was always the kind of person who went over to the edge of the cliff but never jumped - -

[laughter]

MN: - - and I had friends who jumped.

GM: Jumped, that's it [laughs].

MN: And I knew enough, or was either scared enough or smart enough not to jump. But I always would go to the edge.

Interviewer: Mark Naison
Interviewee: Ronald and Gloria Marshall
Session 1 May 2, 2005

RM: But in my life, my father and mother, we all in family life took precedence of everything. Know matter what I did I said, "If I do that...my family...how could I live with myself?' My conscience would kill me.

MN: Yeah, yeah. And that's a very powerful thing.

RM: That's a powerful thing that other guys couldn't do.

MN: Anyway, this is a great way to end. Thank you very much.

{END OF INTERVIEW}