

4-28-2006

Lightfoot, Joceyln

Lightfoot, Joceyn. Bronx African American History Project
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Interviewer: Natasha Lightfoot and Mark Naison

Interviewee: Jocelyn Lightfoot

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Transcriber: Jon Ray Johnson

Mark Naison: 2006, and this is the 163rd interview of The Bronx African American History Project. We are here at Fordham University with Jocelyn Lightfoot, an immigrant from Antigua, who worked for thirty years for the phone company and raised two wonderful daughters in The Bronx. Our lead interviewer is one of those daughters, Natasha Lightfoot of NYU who is about to join us as project administrator of The Bronx African American history project. So Natasha, take it away.

Natasha Lightfoot: Mom, you should pin this on your lapel. This is a microphone just to make sure that the sound registers properly. Alright let's get started. The first question is to just tell us when and where you were born.

Jocelyn Lightfoot: I was born in St. John's Antigua in the Caribbean, October sixth, 1946, on a beautiful Sunday morning.

NL: And if you could just describe what your family was like, what your parent's occupations were, how many siblings you had.

JL: My mom, before I was born my mom was a teacher, but then by the time I was born she was more or less a housewife, but a seamstress as well. She did much of the sewing and did a little piano playing. She taught piano lessons. My dad was a motor car mechanic. After that he was a taxi driver at the airport.

NL: How many siblings did you have?

JL: Six.

NL: You had six siblings and you were what?

JL: I was child number four out of seven.

NL: And what was your upbringing like in the Carr household?

JL: Very strict, extremely. We were not allowed like everybody else to go to many parties, other than a little family gathering, whether it was at my aunt's house, or an uncle, fine, but even up to age 16, when I started working at age 16, it was very strict at home because it was church, Sunday school, back home, and once in a while to the movies.

MN: Were the houses electrified in your community? Did they have electricity?

JL: No, in the beginning it was lamp light. I can't even remember when we got electricity, but the good thing is when we got electricity, there was a lamp post right outside our house, so our house was always lit, all around except for the few times when the electricity would go off, whether it was a rainstorm or during the hurricane season. Other than that we were well lit.

NL: Could you elaborate more on the kind of social activities your family involved you and your siblings in.

JL: Well we did go to a lot of picnics. That was, on Easter Monday, that was a holiday for us. Whit Monday, days like that, we would all gather together, and by six o'clock, we were out to the beach. And that went on maybe from 6am to 6pm. Other than that, little birthday parties.

NL: Other than that it was church activities?

JL: Yes, much church activity. It was church service in the morning, home, had dinner, listen to the same hymns we sang at church, and then back to Sunday school in the

afternoons. Even when we got home from Sunday school, then we would go to what is a Pentecostal Sunday school. Then to night service. Other than school, it was church.

NL: And what was your educational experience like in Antigua?

JL: Well, I started at this little private school in this lad's house, her name is Merrill Hughes. She is still alive, I still go and look for her when I go to visit, and that lady means the world to me because much of what I learned and what I even know today, I can say I attributed to her teachings. And I was with her from say age four and a half to eleven, and then I went to the Catholic school, which is now known as the Christ the King High School.

NL: And this was run by - -

JL: The nuns. It was a Catholic school run by the nuns, and the nuns lived directly across from the school. And that was quite a strict school too, very strict. And I learned, you know, much of the Catholic faith there.

NL: But what denomination was your family?

JL: Anglican, which here is called Episcopal, but it was sort of close to the Catholic.

MN: When you were growing up, did you have much exposure to American culture?

JL: No, when I was growing up, no. I would say the exposure came when I started making trips here. Because I worked for the airline in Antigua, Leeward Islands Air Transport, and of course I was allowed a free trip every year, so when I started making trips here, which was 19, I think my first trip was to England, 1967, and in '68 I came to New York for the first time.

NL: I wanted to ask along those same lines, so what were your earliest recollections of Antiguans migrating in large numbers to the United States, when do you think that started?

JL: Well, I can think back when my aunt, my aunt came here as a young girl, she was only in her twenties when she came to live here.

NL: How much older than you do you think your aunt was?

JL: If my aunt were alive today, she would have been about a hundred and five.

NL: Wow, okay, and you're sixty this year?

JL: Yes.

NL: So she was about let's say, so she came here when she was twenty - -

JL: Yes, about.

NL: So she was part of the earlier migration in the 1920s then?

JL: Yes, and she came to Harlem.

NL: She came to Harlem, right.

JL: So when I came here, Harlem was the first place I knew.

NL: I was wondering what kinds of ideas circulated about the United States in Antigua.

What kind of ideas circulated about life there when you were thinking about going?

JL: Well, one of the first things we were told is you have to be so careful when you come to America. You can't be on the street late at night, and I didn't find it was so when I got here. Maybe it's that way these days, but when I got here I felt very safe.

MN: Were you exposed to American movies?

JL: Back home, well the American movies were there. We were not allowed much of this going to the movies, I can tell you, but I personally was not exposed.

NL: What about the music? Did you listen to music at all in your parents household and what - -?

JL: Yes, Brook Benton, Sam Cook, - -

MN: Were there night clubs in Antigua?

JL: There were a few little spots, like there was a place called Hideaway Park up at Gray Hill, but it wasn't for people my age back then, it was for older folks you know. In fact, my parents had their 25th wedding anniversary at that same place, Hideaway Park, and [inaudible] had a place called The Country Club, but still it was older folks then.

NL: At those types of social events, would mostly Caribbean music play or would some American music - - ?

JL: Yes, mostly Caribbean music.

NL: So calypso was the music at that time?

JL: Yes.

NL: I was wondering if you could compare in your estimates how many people were going to London or Toronto at that time versus the United States.

JL: A lot of people were going to London and Toronto for, I think they were going to do housework. Some of them were going to be nannies and so forth.

NL: They were contracted already.

JL: And Toronto, but I think for the states, people came here maybe to better their education and things like that.

NL: When did you meet my father and how?

JL: Well I think I was about eleven or twelve when I first saw him, and that was one Sunday we were going to visit someone that my brother, my [inaudible] brother Everett was going to spend the day at this lady's house and I think that was the first time that I saw him or he saw me. But of course because of the strictness of my parents, that was it. He saw me, I saw him, that was it.

NL: How did you end up developing a relationship?

JL: When I was going to the convent school, we had what we called a study period in the afternoons. We'd go back at about five o'clock, and that study period we mainly did the part of our homework that could be done there. We'd take home books to study, but writing homework, you know, we would do there, the written homework. And I would see him on my way home after the study period say about 6, six thirty.

MN: Was he in school?

JL: No, at that time he had already left school.

NL: And what was he doing?

JL: And he was getting to go to live in the Virgin Islands.

NL: So when you first met him, you knew he was already thinking of migrating?

JL: To St. Croix, yes.

NL: Were there a lot of West Indians, well, at least Antiguans that you knew were migrating to the Virgin Islands?

JL: Yes, there were a few migrating to the Virgin Islands, not too many.

NL: And what kind of work did they do there?

JL: Some worked in the hotels, some worked in the people's homes and others I think did maybe car work, they worked on car engines and things like that.

NL: Right, so manual labor kind of work?

JL: Yes.

NL: And did you know if these people had intentions of ending up on the mainland US or did they - -?

JL: I think ultimately they had intentions of ending up on the mainland.

MN: So move to the Virgin Islands was a step towards the United States?

JL: That was the stepping stone yes.

NL: I was wondering how you came to the decision to migrate to the US.

JL: Having worked for the airline and being allowed to come and see the United States.

I came up on a vacation in April one year, I think it was April 1969 and I'll never forget

because it was Easter Sunday soon after I got here, and it snowed and it snowed and of

course I came up here with sandals, and here I was trying to get out there without boots.

I didn't know anything about boots and I don't think anyone expected snow that Sunday,

however I thought to myself, I can't live here, I'll only spend my vacations and that's it.

I went back home of course and then vacation time came around and I was back. So back

and forth I would go, and I enjoyed the trips because I did shopping, I really loved

shopping - -

NL: And where would you shop when you would come here?

JL: I shopped either at Third Avenue, Alexander's and Hern's.

MN: Now, how did you end up in The Bronx?

JL: Because my aunt told me how I could get to Alexander's and Hern's. Those were the stores she directed me to.

MN: And she was living in Harlem and told you to shop in The Bronx?

JL: Yes, she sent me on a bus, number 30, and that bus comes right across, I think it's 149th Street, because my aunt lived at 134 W143rd Street between Seventh and Lenox, and she sent me to Alexander's and Hern's. And of course there were those shoe stores like Simco and other shoe stores. Of course Maclaren, McCrory, and Green, they were right on Third Avenue.

MN: So it was known in Harlem that The Bronx was a great place to shop?

JL: She put me on that bus right at 145th or 149th and Lennox Avenue, and the bus came right over, it wasn't a problem, and she told me where to take the bus coming right back.

MN: And this was in the late 60s?

JL: 69, 70, yes because my first trip was in 69.

NL: What was your experience like in these stores? Were there many other people, Black people shopping there?

JL: A lot of Black people shopping, but things were cheap and I thought they were the best things I could ever get [laughter]. I thought they were the best. Other than that, the only other place she sent me to was 116th Street and Park Avenue, that was the market.

MN: The Market.

JL: She took me there herself, to the market.

NL: What did your aunt do for a living?

JL: My aunt, I think she worked with some white folks, but by the time I settled and lived here, of course she wasn't working anymore, she was just an old lady. She constantly made trips to Antigua too, she enjoyed that.

NL: You know it's funny, I haven't really heard that much - -

JL: About her?

NL: About her, but also about people of that first migration going back and forth regularly.

JL: Yes, eventually, she did make a few trips to Antigua, yes.

NL: Did you even know that you were going to end up - -

JL: In The Bronx?

NL: In The Bronx, or even staying in New York as long as you did?

JL: No, I never would have thought that I would be here for more than my three weeks vacation from time to time. In fact, the very first time, because I was so turned off by the snow, I was due to stay here three weeks and I decided, no, I won't stay here for three weeks, one week and I am going back home. But I never knew I would end up in The Bronx

NL: When did my dad end up coming up?

JL: Your dad came up towards the end of 1969.

NL: So he was here when you would be visiting?

JL: Yes.

NL: Where was he living?

JL: He was living at 930 St. Nicholas Avenue. That's St. Nicholas Avenue and one hundred and, maybe a hundred and fifty something street. I think they call that way Sugar Hill.

NL: Yeah.

NL: That's where he lived. He lived with his aunt.

NL: He lived with his aunt, Auntie Cynthia?

JL: Yes.

NL: Okay, and when did he end up moving to The Bronx?

JL: Well, in 1970, we got married and we lived at 1208 Clay Avenue in The Bronx, so that's 1970, December 26th.

MN: Did you get married in an Episcopal Church?

JL: Trinity Episcopal Church of Morrisania.

MN: How did you find that particular Episcopal church?

JL: My friend Jackie, who is now living in St. Croix, and was a schoolmate of mine, her mom is a number one lady [inaudible] - -

NL: She is probably one of the oldest members of that church.

JL: So she still goes to Trinity and she told me about Trinity and I started going to Trinity.

MN: So at that time you were living in Manhattan?

JL: I came from Harlem to The Bronx - -

MN: To Clay Avenue.

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JL: Right, and in the beginning, I attended Beulah Methodist Church because my aunt is Methodist, My aunt was Methodist, so I attended Beulah [inaudible] Methodist with my aunt, but as long as this lady told me about Trinity, that became my church.

NL: And who was the minister of the church at the time?

JL: Reverend Wendell Roberts, who passed away December of last year.

MN: Was he of Caribbean descent?

JL: Jamaican.

MN: Jamaican. And was the congregation mostly West Indian?

JL: I'd say.

NL: So you would say by the early seventies, the congregation was the majority West Indian?

JL: Yes, quite a lot of West Indians who attended. Some Americans of course, but quite a lot of West Indians.

NL: Black Americans?

JL: Yes.

NL: Were there any other groups of people or was it a mainly Black congregation?

JL: I would say it was mainly Black.

NL: Did you get involved in other activities in the church?

JL: In that church, no, I didn't.

NL: You were just attending?

JL: I was just attending.

NL: In terms of getting housing, you and my father lived on Clay Avenue. What kind of apartment was it?

JL: It was a kitchenette. A kitchenette that was always filled with people.

NL: [laughs] Now why would it be filled with people? Describe what exactly led to it being overcrowded.

JL: Friends would come from Brooklyn, friends would come from the island, and I guess they just felt comfortable there and he just had the nice records to play and you know, he always kept the Antiguan rum and the brandy and things like that. And the beer, the Heineken, he always loved Heineken [laughs].

NL: For the record, my father's name is William Lightfoot.

JL: I think his buddies that he knew from back home that were now living here, regardless of where we were living, on a Saturday, they all came by. Friday night, Saturday. And then, there was a pool room next to us. There was a guy next to us that had a pool room and the guys loved to come by and play pool.

MN: Clay Ave, what's the cross streets?

JL: We were between 167th and 168th.

MN: And how far is that from the Grand Concourse?

JL: Oh, not too far, just a couple of blocks up.

NL: Like about four or five blocks.

JL: No, about seven blocks up.

NL: About seven blocks up, okay.

JL: Because to get downtown, sometimes I'd use the 35 bus, or I'd walk to the Concourse and use the D train.

NL: Okay, was it a difficult process to obtain housing like the one you got at Clay Avenue?

JL: No, I really don't even remember how we got it, but I can't remember and kind of difficulty. Now from Clay Avenue, we moved to Clark Place, which is closer to the Grand Concourse, that's between the Concourse and Jerome Avenue.

MN: Clay Avenue is closer to Webster?

JL: Yes, it's next to Webster.

MN: It's the street next to Webster?

JL: Yes, yes.

NL: Okay. When did you move to Clark Place?

JL: I would say it was around '72, October.

MN: And was that a bigger apartment?

JL: Yes it was. [inaudible] that I will never forget.

MN: One of those old art deco buildings.

JL: Right.

NL: And what were the neighbors that you had, what were they like? What kind of neighbors did you have in that area?

JL: I had a few Irish neighbors, some Spanish, and a few Black Americans.

MN: Were you working at that time?

JL: Yes.

MN: And where were you working?

JL: 72 I started to work, January of 72 I started to work with telephones.

MN: And what was the application process to get that job?

JL: Well, I'll tell you, a friend from Antigua recommended that I go to Man Power on Third Avenue. Man Power was on Third Avenue - -

MN: Third Avenue in The Bronx?

JL: Bronx again, a hundred and sixty something street. And I went there and I did a test and from that test, I guess according to the way I had passed, they decided where they would send me for employment. I passed and they sent me to the telephone company. I think it was at 1775 Grand Concourse. They told me I passed for clerical, but they only had openings for operator and would I be willing to start as an operator, and I thought, rather than sitting at home. So I went to the operator job which I did for about one year, then when they opened the openings in the various offices, I applied for one at 5030 Broadway, that's upper Manhattan. I got it and I went there to work. From there I was sent back to The Bronx, and from The Bronx, I was sent to 140 Worth Street, across from the World Trade, and that was an upgrade in pay and everything.

NL: What kind of work did you do at the phone company at the different [inaudible]

JL: In the beginning, I was information operator. After that, I was working on orders, when customers would call the business office to place their orders for new service, or change of service, I was working into typing up those orders and then I got the upgrade to do the inputs like adding various features and things like that, until eventually they

formed this new office called the RCMAC, which is Recent Change Memory Administration Center. And I did recent changes and everything [inaudible]

MN: Now is a lot of that involving computers?

JL: Yes.

MN: Did you go for computer training?

JL: Yes, at times we would go to another telephone building. Somebody would come in and give training maybe for three days. And at other times,, a person would come into the office and do a little.

MN: What sort of work was your husband doing at the time?

JL: Well, he was, he then opened a body and fender repair shop on Third Avenue on 166th Street.

NL: And was it easy for him to go into his own business?

JL: In the beginning, I thought it was a big risk that he was taking, but he said listen, you have to start somewhere, and that was his desire and he intended to pursue it, and he did. It was a little struggle in the beginning, but little by little.

MN: Were most of the people who worked for him Antiguans?

JL: Yes, he had two young fellows working with him, and they were Antiguans. But he became good friends with an American guy where he had worked previously before he opened up his place and that guy sort of gave him insights and assisted him. One of the good things that happened when he had his work shop, he had a contract with a car dealership no Jerome Avenue called Capital Motors, so when people would turn in these cars maybe with a little dent or fender, he would fix them up like next to new. Yes, and

he really had it good when he worked for Capital Motors. I don't think they are there anymore on Jerome Avenue, there is probably something else there now.

NL: Was it easy to find employment? Did you find it that the other women that you knew coming from Antigua, did they find employment as easy as you did and what other options were available?

JL: Maybe not as easy, but what I found, quite a few folks that I knew back home, they were working maybe as nurses or as receptionists at the doctors office back home, so they came up here and got into the medical field, you know. In the hospitals and stuff like that.

MN: Now, your husband's business on Third Avenue and 167th Street, that's a pretty rough neighborhood in the seventies. Did he have to worry about getting robbed or was that not an issue of a body shop?

JL: I don't think that he ever worried about that. I didn't get that feeling.

NL: I meant to ask you if you felt safe in Morrisania in the seventies as far as walking around - -

JL: Yes, I felt quite good.

NL: I was wondering if you or my father engaged in political activities in The Bronx or any kind of conversations - -

JL: No, no. The only political activities I would say, when the political folks from Antigua came up to New York, they would always come to our house and hold their own little meetings in the house.

MN: Were you ever members of an Antiguan social or fraternal organization in New York?

JL: No. He started a Caribbean social club up on White Plains Road and 226th Street.

NL: It was a night club right?

JL: Yes a night club. But the Antigua Progressive Society and things like that, we were never members of that.

JL: But you, but he still maintained kind of ties to the political activities on the island as to - - ?

JL: Yes, and whenever the government ministers would visit New York, somehow he always managed to hook up with them, and like I said, they would have their own political meetings right in our apartment.

MN: So when you were living at Clark Place, Trinity Episcopal is your church?

JL: I still continued at Trinity, and then just around, I continued at Trinity maybe for two years and then I went on to St. Simeon, which is on Carol Place and 165th.

MN: That's near the Grand - -

JL: That's now demolished yes.

MN: It's near the Grand Concourse?

JL: Near the Grand Concourse and 165th.

MN: And it's no longer there?

JL: No, the building is demolished.

MN: And when did you move to Castle Hill?

JL: May of 1982.

NL: Right, oh wait, you skipped some people [laughter].

JL: You know which people I skipped.

NL: When did you have us, for the record?

JL Michelle was born in 1973 and Natasha, June of 1978, so they were both God blessed girls.

MN: How long did you stay off from work after having your children?

JL: With Michelle, I stayed over a year because Michelle was premature, so I decided no. But with Natasha, I stayed home six months.

NL: And was it easy to go back to the phone company after [inaudible] [laughter]?

JL: Yes, oh yes. No problem at all because with the phone company, all you had to do, they had their own medical department, so as long as you had an appointment to go to medical before you got back because that you had to do.

MN: Who took care of the babies when you went back to work?

JL: Well, with Michelle, there was a neighbor next to me, I think she may have been Dominican or something like that, very nice lady. She and her daughter lived and I asked them and they said they would gladly do it. They did it for a very short time. And then my mom came up to visit she spent a few months and she took care of them. And then Cleve's mom came up, and then after that, Michelle went to Morrisania Daycare Center, which is on Boston Road. And from there to Christ the King, which is on the Concourse and Marcy Place near 170th.

MN: And who took care of Natasha?

JL: A Spanish lady took care of Natasha. Instead, I should say two Spanish ladies because in the beginning, it was Maria, and then Maria moved back to Puerto Rico. And, wait what was her name? When Maria left, this other lady took care of you, now I can't remember her name. Francis, Francis. And I mean, she was well taken care of by this lady. Even though, I was a little uneasy, I said they were not family you know, but they took very good care of Natasha.

NL: So was that kind of a thing that was done in the neighborhood? Did you find that women with young children relied on their neighbors as well?

JL: Yes, and I was very happy to know I didn't even have to take them out until Natasha started at Excelsior Daycare Center.

MN: Which was where?

JL: You know the Seventh Day Adventist building on 169th and the Concourse, Excelsior is part of that church.

MN: Now, living in a building with people from different countries, did people share food and things like that as well as childcare?

JL: I know that the Spanish folks, especially the two families that Natasha was involved with, they did. I'd come home sometimes and she was fed. I when I'd think I'd have to give her dinner, she was already fed, and - -

NL: No wonder I like rice and beans [laughter]

JL: There was a Jewish guy too, who lived across from me and he was very good with my girls too, as little as they were, he was very good with them. He would always ask can he give them some chocolate.

NL: Did you find that the neighborhood was changing over the course of the seventies?

JL: Little by little you could see that. You could see that it was changing and maybe it was time to move on to other parts.

NL: What were the things that were indicators that there was a change happening?

JL: Well, a lot of folks hanging on the corners. A lot of people hanging out on the stoop as they call it, and maybe little break ins out on the Avenue, out on Jerome Avenue. Some buildings with maybe a fire and then that building was there, you know, empty buildings in the area.

NL: So the fires, you can recall a lot of buildings going on fire in the late seventies?

JL: Yes.

NL: How did others react to the fires happening? Were there a lot of people who were kind of feeling the same way about the neighborhood?

JL: I don't really think so. But I think your dad was the person that wanted to get out of that neighborhood.

NL: Before we even get to moving out, I wanted to talk a little bit more about the socializing you did in The Bronx. Were you mainly around other Antiguans, or did you meet other West Indians as well?

JL: Well, I met quite a few other West Indians, but I was mainly around a lot of Antiguans, especially because your dad soon got into business with the social club. He started the social club with another guy, so it was two partners until eventually the guy moved back to Antigua and he was on his own.

MN: Did he keep the body shop?

JL: Yes.

NL: He kept the body shop and had the night club.

JL: He kept the body shop and the night club was only on a Friday night and Saturday night.

NL: So mostly Antiguans attended that night club?

JL: Yes.

NL: And what kind of music played in the night club?

JL: A lot of calypso music.

MN: So Antiguans didn't listen to reggae, the Jamaican music as much as Trinidadian music?

JL: I'd say more Trinidadian music than reggae at the time when he had the social club.

MN: So would they ever play Bob Marley?

JL: Yes they did, you know Bob Marley is a great guy so - -

NL: But in general it was mostly [inaudible] and they played Antiguan music as well obviously.

JL: Yes, most of it was.

NL: How were you able to access the food or other products that were common to Antiguan cooking or anything like that?

JL: Well there was a time when folks would say you could get these things in Brooklyn, so we had relatives in Brooklyn so we got whatever until eventually little by little, there were places on White Plains Road and so forth.

NL: So you would travel to the North Bronx to get - -

JL: Yes.

NL: I see.

MN: Did you cook Antiguan food at home?

JL: Yes, I did.

NL: And what kinds of food did you make.

MN: Start with breakfast and then we'll move forward.

NL: Food is an important part of the interview process.

JL: Should I start with the Sunday morning breakfast?

MN: Sure, I can - -

JL: that was the salted cod fish with the egg plant, okra, bread from the Antiguan bakery,

--

MN: Where did you get the okra?

JL: Whether the fresh or the frozen - -

NL: And there were green grocers on the Concourse.

JL: Right, on 170th Street you know. The food stand would have it fresh of course. So breakfast was big. Oh and the avocado, I can't forget that. And sliced cucumbers. And then dinner would be rice and peas, maybe some fried dumplings or Johnny Cakes as they call it. Chicken and or curried goat or stewed pork, some kind of vegetable, string beans, carrots, or salad. And there was ginger beer or some of that good Caribbean punch or something.

NL: You mentioned Brooklyn. I was wondering if you traveled to other areas of the city and what you thought they were like in comparison to The Bronx during the seventies.

JL: Well, because my brother lived in Queens, we did travel quite a lot to Queens. To Brooklyn, I'd go only to visit my cousins, mostly at Christmas time or Labor Day. That was a must, Labor Day in Brooklyn.

NL: the parade had already been started by then?

JL: Yes.

NL: Did you go on a regular basis to the parade every year?

JL: Yes, in the beginning, I did go because of your dad's involvement with the social club. He was on a truck and we'd get on that truck.

MN: Do you have any pictures of the truck?

JL: No.

NL: But you do have pictures of the club right? The interior of the club?

JL: I have some old pictures, but I doubt it's the interior of the club.

NL: No? Okay.

JL: I may have pictures of him dressed to go to the club or something like that, but - -

NL: Where was the club now?

JL: White Plains Road and 226th, right on the corner.

NL: Back to the question I was asking, what was your impression of Queens - -

JL: The other boroughs?

NL: Or Brooklyn versus the Bronx?

JL: Well, I always thought that Queens seemed to be a nicer borough than the Bronx, but I look back now and I realize it was because of where in Queens I was going because at times now I drive through some parts of Queens and I come to realize, you know, some

of these parts look even worse than The Bronx. On first impression I thought Queens was a nicer neighborhood.

NL: And I wanted to ask what your impressions were of African Americans in The Bronx at the time when you first arrived and what you thought other people in your group of Antiguans or Caribbean people might have thought of them.

JL: Might have thought of what?

NL: African Americans.

JL: Well, I always thought that, especially in the work place, I always felt as though they didn't seem to feel at ease around us. I used to think that they felt that we came to take their jobs you know. And we were harder workers than they were, I will admit that. We were always at it, whereas they would stop for a smoke, you know.

NL: And there were a lot of other West Indian women working in the phone companies and - -?

JL: Not too many. There were a few from Jamaica, and it always seemed like the Caribbean tried to stick together because somehow the Black Americans always behaved as though we were taking their jobs. That was my impression.

NL: I guess, going back to the question, I guess, I'm wondering if you think that any other groups had a view of West Indian people as well, like whites or Hispanics, might have thought of Caribbean people coming to the neighborhood and vice versa.

JL: Well, I always feel like other groups, whether it's folks from Trinidad, folks from Jamaica, folks from where ever, even the Spanish I feel may have got that feeling that the African Americans thought that we were there to take their jobs.

NL: Okay, so there was kind of like an immigrant versus native born tension.

JL: Yes, exactly.

NL: What were your relationships to the white people in the area? Were there many white people in the Morrisania area at the time?

JL: Yes, some Irish, some Jewish, yes.

NL: And how did they receive the influx of - - ?

JL: I had no problems. I was quite comfortable with them, everybody seemed to have received me quite alright, but little by little, I could see them moving out.

NL: You saw them going farther and farther up the Concourse?

JL: Yes, moving out farther and farther away.

NL: And where were they going? Do you know?

JL: I can't say. Maybe like up in the Pelham Bay area, Throgs Neck.

NL: So just going up to the more suburban area of The Bronx, I see. So when did you and my dad decide to leave Morrisania and move to Castle Hill?

JL: May of 82.

NL: And how did you find out about the Jamie Towers Development in particular?

JL: I think one of his friends who at the time was trying to get into Jamie Towers told him and of course, we filled the forms, it was a long waiting list, and finally, we got the call to come look at the apartment and - -

NL: Did you have any prior knowledge of the Mitchell Lama Program at all?

JL: No.

NL: Okay. And what were your impressions of Castle Hill versus Morrisania?

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JL: Well, I felt very good about coming up to Castle Hill and that was my first time even going to that side of The Bronx, when I had went to look at the apartment. I had never been that way before, and I felt quite good about going up that way, although many folks would say Castle Hill, oh I don't like that area.

NL: Many folks would say that even then?

JL: Yes.

NL: And why do you think they would say that they didn't like the neighborhood ?

JL: Well you know, some people for instance, when you talk to some people in Brooklyn, they say I don't like The Bronx. You talk to people in Long Island, oh, I don't like to come to The Bronx. I don't know what is it they have against The Bronx, you can't tell me tell me about anywhere but The Bronx. [laughter] I love The Bronx.

MN: Do you think they think of The Bronx as filled with crime and violence?

JL: Yes, but you know. It's everywhere.

NL: And what was Jamie Towers like as a place to live?

JL: As in what?

NL: What did you feel like the buildings, the quality of the buildings, or what did you feel about the neighbors as well?

JL: Very good, and I was happy to know that we had the security guards, so I felt very safe in Jamie Towers, I really did. But it's not as if I wasn't feeling safe where I was before, but little by little, you felt like it was time to move on. But having the security guards there and the buildings were kept very clean and - -

MN: Was the shopping better near Jamie Towers?

JL: Yes.

NL: When you were saying the buildings were kept clean, do you think the buildings in Morrisania weren't kept as clean as the ones at Jamie Towers or kept clean at all?

JL: It was clean, it was clean in Morrisania, it was clean, but not as clean as Jamie, I must admit.

NL: And what kinds of neighbors did you have in the building?

JL: In Jamie?

NL: Yes.

JL: Italian, Irish, Jewish, of course some Black Americans.

NL: Were there Hispanics as well?

JL: Oh yes.

NL: How long did the white population remain in the area? Were they there for most of the time that you had been there?

JL: I will say, in there, we still have quite a few of them, we still have quite a few.

NL: Okay, because you hear a lot of people saying that there was a migration. Like we interviewed some people in Castle Hill, the Petersons recently and they talked about how the Castle Hill Housing projects were filled with different white ethnic groups who eventually moved out.

JL: We still have them.

MN: Now did Natasha first go to school in Castle Hill? Or did she start in Clark Place?

JL: No, she only went to daycare at Excelsior, Seventh Day, and then she came to John Vianney, which is right on the corner of Castle Hill and Seward Ave. That's where she started.

MN: That's Catholic?

JL: Yes.

MN: Did you send your older daughter to Catholic school?

JL: Yes, - -

NL: She started out at Christ the King - -

JL: And all the Concourse children ended up at St. John [inaudible]

MN: When did you decide to start attending St. Andrews?

JL: Well, I moved over May of 82 and I think I started St. Andrew's around about October or so because I still traveled across town to go to St. Simion's. And then after a while I said why am I still going all this way? Maybe I ought to find a church in the area, but when I moved to Jamie Towers, I mainly headed towards the White Plains Road area. I hardly did go to the Catholic area, so, I did not know that there was an Episcopal church right close to me on Castle Hill until someone said it.

MN: So were you going to St. Luke's up in - - ?

NL: No, we never attended there - -

JL: I never attended there until these, until just a couple of years ago I started visiting - -

NL: Going to events there.

JL: At St. Luke's.

NL: Before you get to discussing St. Andrew's because I know that will take up a good part of the discussion, I wanted to ask you what your thoughts were about the area and why you chose to send us to Catholic school as oppose to public school.

JL: Well, because most of my sisters too, we attended Catholic school in Antigua.

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGINNIG OF SIDE B]

JL: Because I attended Catholic school in Antigua, and my sisters did too, except for one sister. I decided I wanted the same for them so that's the reason I never even looked into the public school system. I just automatically decided that I'd like for them to go to Catholic school also.

NL: Did you have any impressions of the public school system from the people that you knew sending their children to public school?

JL: Well, when I moved to Jamie Towers, the first school that I was told about that was really a very good school, which is on Lafayette, but because I knew that I wanted my girls to attend Catholic school, I didn't even inquire. Stevenson High School was right on the corner too, but I just intended for them to go to Catholic school so I never checked into the public school system.

NL: Okay, so I guess talking about St. Andrew's when you started, what was the congregation like at St. Andrew's?

JL: We had a few white families, not many. A lot of Black Americans, a few Jamaicans, few Caribbean I would say.

NL: Of the other Caribbean islands?

JL: Yes, all the other islands.

NL: And who was the minister at the time when you joined?

JL: Father Harvey was just about on his way out then. Edwin Harvey.

NL: Who used to teach here actually.

JL: Really?

MN: Yes, in our department.

JL: Wow.

MN: So he left just as you arrived?

JL: Yes.

MN: And was he a popular minister?

JL: Yes, and well loved. I'll tell you even now, you speak to some of the older folks, and our present minister, his name is Father George, but a lot of times, some ladies talk to me and they say, you know Father Harvey said, and they really mean Father George.

NL: Father Harvey is still in their minds.

MN: Where did he go?

JL: St. Augustine, in Manhattan.

NL: Lower East Side right?

JL: Yes.

MN: And he is still there?

JL: Yes, he is still there.

MN: We should interview him.

NL: Actually we really should.

JL: You would love to?

NL: Yeah.

JL: Yes, I could get in touch with him.

NL: Yeah, that would be great actually. I think that would be a great interview.

JL: But he is the one that is responsible for St. Andrew's House, you know our church has that house where seniors sleep?

MN: Right.

NL: Did you know much about that process by which they came into real estate?

JL: No, no, no, no, because that happened just before I - -

MN: And who succeeded Father Harvey?

JL: Father [inaudible]

NL: I think so, yeah.

JL: No, I think it was Father Massidas.

NL: No, it was Canon Smith.

JL: It was Canon Smith first and then Massidas?

NL: Right, Canon Smith he was an African American.

MN: Canon - - ?

JL: Edwin Smith.

MN: And were you part of the interview process of finding the new minister?

JL: No, the search committee, no.

NL: But what activities did you take place in, did you take, you know, engage yourself and us in?

JL: That I engaged you and Michelle?

NL: Well, I guess you can talk about which ever one you want to talk about first.

JL: Well, you and Michelle, when you became part of the [inaudible] group, and you were both part of the youth group, but I only involved myself at the time with the Episcopal Church Women's Group. Until now, I kind of got into other things.

NL: And what does the Episcopal Church Women's Group do?

JL: We took care of the church [laughter]. The Women's Group, well we were responsible every Sunday for the coffee hour that came after service, and on Sundays when we had the children being confirmed, we would see about whatever had to do with confirmation, we made sure that all of that was taken care of. And we held certain events, fundraisers. Yes, throughout that year we would hold a lot of fundraisers, luncheons and different things to raise funds for the church.

NL: I guess I was wondering if you saw any changes in the congregation in St. Andrew's over the course of time that you have been there?

JL: Yes, I have seen changes, I have seen ministers come and go, I have seen parishioners come and leave. I have even seen some that have left and come back.

NL: And what kinds of people ended up coming in over the course of time?

JL: A lot of Caribbean people have come in I must say.

NL: So you feel like there has been kind of a change over in the majority of the population?

JL: Yes, because I would say the majority now it's Caribbean people.

MN: Do you have any African members of your congregation?

JL: Yes, we do.

NL: And they came around when would you estimate?

JL: I would say maybe the Africans came maybe within the last ten years.

MN: From what countries?

JL: Liberia, - -

NL: I think there was someone from Nigeria.

JL: Yes, what's her name is from there - -

NL: Salina.

JL: Salina, Eferaki. And that lady might be too.

NL: Yeah, I know who you are talking about. Yeah, so there are some, a lot of West Africans have come in.

JL: We have maybe, I'd say about four families.

NL: And I was wondering what kind of role do you think St. Andrew's has played in the Castle Hill community?

JL: Well I must say, first we, at one time we had the seniors, the seniors from Pathways for Youth building, the seniors of Castle Hill projects. They were housed in St. Andrew's while their place was under repair, so at least I know we have reached out to seniors. The alcoholics anonymous, they meet in St. Andrew's I think it's every Saturday and every first Tuesday. And right now, we have the Kiddie College in St. Andrew.

MN: Kiddie College?

JL: Yes, where the little people attend school. Yes, I think we have about 22 children that come in in the mornings from 8 o'clock to about 2:30. Then we have the after school program, so the kids attend the program.

NL: And there is a summer day camp as well.

JL: Yes, each year we have the summer day camp.

MN: And you have a food festival?

JL: Yes, every October. Every October, and we have foods from all the different places.

NL: And that attracts a large - -

JL: It does, usually the second Saturday in October.

NL: I guess - -

JL: And we also have a family day, out on the lawn and this year that will be July eighth.

NL: So, I guess I was wondering what your thoughts were about kind of the difference between the types of families that attended churches, St. Andrew's or other churches versus ones that you knew who were not really a part of the church in your mind.

JL: Are you talking about folks who maybe just attend to visit?

NL: No, meaning people who have no kind of affiliation with a church or anything like that in the area. Did you feel like there was a difference between the kinds of - -?

JL: You know, people may not attend St. Andrew's but they may attend Jehovah's witnesses, or they may attend a Pentecostal or Baptist.

NL: Right. No, but I meant like if you felt like the kinds of activities that people would be interested in taking part of as a part of a church versus not - -

JL: If I think that St. Andrew's has enough of that or does not?

NL: I guess I don't know if I am being clear, I am trying to get at the question of whether some people in the neighborhood that weren't a part of churches, what kinds of activities you felt they engaged in versus people who were in churches like St. Andrew's or even other churches?

MN: Are like the young people who were not in churches more inclined to get in trouble?

NL: Right, you know what I mean?

JL: Oh, okay.

NL: I am sorry, I guess I'm not being clear or something. [laughter]

JL: Well, that is just my opinion, and to be quite honest, I would feel as though if you were not part of the church, because I do believe that the church made a difference in the lives of many, especially the young people. Because even now, I know my minister would always say do we see what's happening when we listen to the news? Where is the church in all of this? Is the church doing the best it can do? And also what can we,, what can each individual do? So I really do believe that the persons who are not really involved in a church, then there is more chance, more opportunity for them to get into trouble - -

MN: Does St. Andrew's have forums on issues like the war in Iraq, or the environment, or global issues?

JL: I don't think so.

MN: It's more local?

NL: Right, they're more into the local issues.

JL: I think issues like that would just come in, just in a conversation maybe, but not as if they really have a forum for that.

JL: Has St. Andrew's ever been involved in local politics in the area?

JL: I know that from time to time different politicians may attend service. Remember Dennis Coleman, he was quite involved and he was a member of St. Andrew's and he was involved in politics.

MN: Right, but have, there are certain prominent, nationally prominent African American leaders, has Al Sharpton ever spoken?

JL: No, at my church?

MN: Yeah.

JL: No.

MN: Jesse Jackson?

JL: No.

MN: Barack Obama?

JL: No.

MN: Okay.

NL: Nobody like that.

JL: We'd love that.

NL: I think the one political figure that I can remember speaking at St. Andrew's was - -

JL: [inaudible] And then Lenora Fulani.

NL: Lenora Fulani I remember her, right.

JL: She did speak there on Mother's Day.

MN: Does the borough president ever come to visit St. Andrew's.

JL: No, no.

NL: It's normally the local senators.

JL: We've had Pedro Espada. And we've had what's his name, Peter Rivera.

NL: I guess, what do you think your relationship was to the local politics in the area at all, if any at all. Were you interested in it or - -

JL: By living in The Bronx, you have to at least show some kind of interest, but I never really got too involved I must admit.

MN: Now, did you feel that living in your Castle Hill neighborhood, sending your daughters to Catholic school, being involved in St. Andrew's and the Kips Bay Center, they were in a positive, protective environment?

JL: Yes, and I am glad you even mentioned Kips Bay, because I really was happy for the time they attended Kips Bay.

NL: What kinds of activities did you have us going into?

JL: You all were into the dancing at Kips Bay and I think swimming too.

NL: Yes.

MN: So you felt that as a family person, you had everything you needed in The Bronx?

JL: Yes, I honestly felt like my girls were in the place where they should be.

MN: So you never said oh my God I have to move to Scarsdale?

JL: No, no, I never felt like that.

NL: Were you aware of any changes in the neighborhood? Did the increase of drugs or crime in Castle Hill ever enter into your consciousness?

JL: No. From time to time, you would hear bits and pieces in the news or just in conversations in the supermarket, somebody may say something to you , but I never felt that I had to be worried that my children would get involved in anything that they shouldn't. I really felt like they were sound and well rounded and knew right from wrong and I realized that anything can happen whether you know right from wrong, anything can happen. You know, but I never felt like I had to worry and think.

MN: Did you go to work by car or public transportation

JL: Public transportation.

MN: And you never felt safe, unsafe?

JL: No.

NL: Not even during the eighties, you felt unsafe?

JL: No, the only time I got scared was 9/11, you know, after 9/11.

MN: And you never, wow, walking from - -

JL: I worked 3 to 11 in Brooklyn, I had a shift that was 3 to 11, and I took the train from Brooklyn to The Bronx.

MN: And where was the train stop relative to your house?

JL: Coming to The Bronx?

MN: Yeah.

JL: From the bus? Coming from Parkchester, I'd take the bus and the bus stop was right outside my place.

MN: So at 11 at night, you'd take the train to the Parkchester station and the bus to Jamie Towers which was like at midnight?

JL: I would get home about 12:15, yes.

MN: And you never felt unsafe?

JL: I wasn't even worried.

MN: Wow.

JL: I was alright.

NL: Backtracking into another point that came up earlier, you mentioned that your aunt went back and forth to Antigua. When did you start to go, did you start to go back and forth to Antigua over the course of living in The Bronx?

JL: Yes, but not in the beginning. In the beginning, maybe I went once or twice, then after that I just kind of settled here until finally when I did start going back when my mom was beginning to get sick. You know, because my mom had a stroke, and then another stroke, then I made sure that I was going every year.

MN: Now, you know, living in Jamie Towers, where would you go when you wanted to get a good meal, when you wanted to go out to eat? Where were your favorite places?

JL: City Island. Because I didn't do too much going out to eat, I always felt like I loved what I cooked. I loved what I cooked, so I really did a lot of home eating. So City Island, where else can I think. And maybe, maybe a Jamaican restaurant somewhere.

MN: And where would you go for entertainment? Did you ever go to the theater in Manhattan?

JL: Yes, I've been to the Apollo, I've been to, where did Michelle graduate, Radio City. Madison Square Garden here and there, but I'm not too much of a party person per say

[laughter]. I did more house parties. Friends, relatives, a birthday, a baby christening, things like that, I did a lot of that.

MN: Now, your extended family, are they mostly in the New York Metropolitan area or are they all over the country now?

JL: Well, I'd say mostly in the New York Metropolitan area, yes I would say my extended family is here.

NL: Other than that, we just have a branch in London, a branch in Toronto, and then the rest scattered in the Caribbean, you know, in Antigua. You know, I guess, has regular travel to Antigua reshaped your impression of life in The Bronx? Do you see yourself as having long term roots here?

JL: I always have a desire to move back to Antigua and I think that that's a dream that I would like to see fulfilled. And I do believe it could happen, maybe in another three years, maybe another five years, but I wouldn't give up The Bronx?

JL: No, I want a house in Antigua.

MN: A house?

JL: Yes.

NL: But you would still keep your apartment in The Bronx?

JL: But I'd still keep the apartment in The Bronx.

NL: So you see yourself going back.

JL: Because when it comes to my medical and things like that, I want to come right back here for that, so I know I won't be giving up The Bronx.

MN: Where are your doctors in the Bronx located?

JL: The only doctor that I really have in The Bronx is my eye doctor, he is on Pelham Parkway now. My other doctors are affiliated with, my medical doctors are affiliated with St. Luke's so they are in Manhattan.

MN: In Manhattan, right. So you use Manhattan doctors?

JL: Yes, Columbia area, Columbia University area.

NL: That's where we were born actually.

JL: Yes, it was Woman's Hospital, they had a section of St. Luke's that was called Woman's Hospital. It's no longer Woman's now, it's just all St. Luke's. So my doctors are affiliated there.

NL: And you got your affiliation there through your cousin right?

JL: Yes, a cousin that was a nurse at St. Luke's, she's now dead. And there is another sister she was a nurse there and she is still living in Manhattan but she no longer works. And they recommended these doctors to me and I have stuck with them over the years.

NL: So I guess, you know, any other comments, any thoughts about life in The Bronx that you want to close with?

JL: Let me see?

NL: Life as a Caribbean person in The Bronx even.

JL: As a Caribbean person in The Bronx, I'd say that over all, my 35 to 36 years that I have spent here have been happy years. Having lost my husband 5 years ago, that was a very sad thing that happened, but we know that God knows best. But other than that, my impressions of The Bronx, I have had good years in The Bronx, I have had very good

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neighbors, very good church people, good church family, so for me, My Bronx life has

been wonderful.

MN: Thank You very much, wow.

[END OF INTERVIEW]