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## Lightfoot, Michelle and Lightfoot, Natasha

Bronx African American History Project  
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Brian Purnell (BP): Today is November 10, 2004 the Bronx African American History Project is speaking with Michelle and Natasha Lightfoot. Thank you for coming today to participate.

Natasha Lightfoot (NL): Thank you, maybe we should identify ourselves by voice-

BP: Yes, so - -

ML: This is Michelle Lightfoot - -

BP: Could you actually spell your first and last names?

ML: Certainly, M-I-C-H-E-L-L-E, last name Lightfoot, L-I-G-H-T-F-O-O-T.

Natasha Lightfoot (NL): And I'm Natasha, N-A-T-A-S-H-A, and I spell "Lightfoot" quite differently. No I'm just kidding, [Laughter] I spell it the exact same way [Laughter].

BP: So, the first set of questions is biographical and then we're going to probably speak a little bit about your parents. And the stories you know maybe about their individual histories and their migration to the United States. So, just to get some biographical information on both of you, I'll start with Michelle. When is your birthday?

ML: November 8, 1973.

BP: Oh, so you just had a birthday recently?

ML: I just had a birthday recently.

BP: Well, happy belated birthday.

ML: Well thank you.

BP: And where were you born?

ML: I was born in New York, at St. Luke's Hospital. It was then known as Women's Hospital, and now it's, now it's St. Luke's.

BP: Where was the first place that you had lived as a child?

ML: We lived at 20 Clark Place, in the Bronx.

BP: And Natasha, when is your birthday?

NL: June 21, 1978, and I was born in the same hospital, and went to 20 Clark Place, too  
[Laughter].

BP: And, now what are your parents' names?

ML: Jocelyn Lightfoot,

NL: J-O-C-E-L-Y-N

ML: And William Lightfoot,

NL: W-I-L-L-I-A-M [Crosstalk].

BP: When, when did they come to the United States from Antigua?

NL: My dad came here in; I think it was 69 or 68.

ML: I think it was 67 [Crosstalk] or 68.

NL: Something like that.

ML: And my mom came in 1970.

NL: Yea.

BP: Had they know each other on the island?

NL and ML: Yes, yea.

BP: When were they married?

NL: They

ML: married December 26, 1970, yea.

BP: So they married in the United States?

ML: Yea, at Trinity Episcopal in Morrisania.

BP: Yes.

ML: Yep.

BP: How did they meet?

NL: Well my dad tells a funny story, I think he saw mom playing games at her school, that's where they met, or at least he saw her first there. That was, I think he said she was about maybe 14 years old or 15 years old. And that's where they kind of started.

ML: Saw her in the school yard.

NL: Saw her in the school yard one day, yea.

BP: Does your mom have a different story?

ML: Well,

NL: It's funny, I've never asked her so I don't know if she would concur, but that's the story that he told so I'll go with that [Laughter].

ML: Yea, the things that I was always told, well we were both always told about it was that you know like you know, Grandma, my my parents, my my my mom's parents, my grandfather and grandmother weren't too into my father. And so my mother used to have to like sneak around to try to like meet up with him. So like my younger aunts tell the stories of you know because the rule was always that everybody had to come home at the same time.

BP: Yep.

ML: Nobody, if all three of you went out, because my mom has, you know two sisters that come behind her, my aunt Heather and my aunt Gwen, and they if all three of them went out, all three of them had to come home together at the same time and so my mom as soon as all three of them had gotten out of the house my mom would run off and go try

to find my dad so my aunt Gwen and aunt Heather would be kind of left outside the school gate or something waiting on her [Laughter] to somehow resurface from whatever rendezvous she planned [Laughter] with my father.

ML: A lot people in the neighborhood would kind of tell my maternal grandparents, "Oh, we've seen your daughter."

NL: And she wasn't where she was supposed to be.

ML: wasn't where she was supposed to be.

NL: Yea

ML: So by the time she got home that report had probably already gotten to them. So they wouldn't exactly be very happy - -

NL: Yea, of course it would be [Laughter] both awaiting her but she got them anyways.

BP: What is the age difference between your parents?

NL: Oh, I would say about five years?

ML: Yea, I would say about five years, because - -

NL: Yea, about five years.

ML: Yes.

NL: Yep.

BP: Now why do you say that your mother's family wasn't too into your father?

ML: Well, I think they just thought he was a little fast. I think - -

NL: Which he kind of was, he was always kind of known as a slick kind of guy, you know, pretty well dressed, pretty, had a way with the ladies. They kind of knew that he was, you know, out there. Plus, he, you know, I guess maybe too you know he was fairly

independent because my grandmother was raising himself and his younger brother on her own. It wasn't like the same kind of family like - -

ML: family structure

NL: you know as as my gram as my mother's grandparents who you know - -

ML: as our maternal grandparents - -

NL: who were married and had a home.

ML: Where as my paternal grandparent was single and she had gone away to Dominique and to Cheriso to work [Crosstalk] and so she left her two sons [Crosstalk] my dad and my uncle Jimmy with her great- with her grandmother because it was their great grandmother to raise so they were pretty much very independent. So my grandparents also knew that.

BP: So two questions, do you know your parents' birthdates?

ML: Yes - -

NL: Yea, my dad was born April 9, 1942 and my mom was born October 6, 1946.

BP: And where were they from in Antigua? What part of Antigua?

ML: My dad is from Gray's Farm, G-R-A-Y'S, Gray's Farm and my mom is from Ottos, O-T-T-O-S.

BP: Now, is Gray's Farm a neighborhood or - -

NL: Yea, it is a neighborhood it is traditionally home to working class people, always.

It's like that now, Gray's Farm is like seen as one of the still you know existing ghettos in Antigua. Where it's like you know criminal activities known to take place, you know, generally I mean good people have come out of Gray's Farm, and have done good things, but - -

ML: But it's certainly - -

NL: It's certainly still has that character.

ML: An undercurrent if you will.

NL: Yea, exactly and Ottos is a little bit not you know a little you know less so you know what I mean - -

ML: Middle class, middle class.

NL: It's more middle class, especially when my mom was coming out. Now it's kind of you know - -

ML: mixed, more mixed

NL: changing, getting a little bit more like lower you know, kind of, let's say more working class, but when my mom was coming up it definitely was - -

ML: middle class

NL: more middle class.

BP: Did your, do you know what occupations your, your grandparents had on both sides?

ML and NL: Oh yes.

BP: Let's start with your mother's family and talk about that a little bit. What did your maternal grandfather and grandmother do for a living?

ML: Well my maternal grandmother was a seamstress at home. She was also a teacher, a piano teacher and I think she also - -

NL: Taught at schools

ML: Yea, she was also a school teacher.

NL: Because she was from a village in the east of the island called, Seatons and a lot of people from Seatons knew her as teacher Irene, so that was her, that's her like name, you know - -

ML: Throughout the island

NL: Throughout the island a lot of people called her teacher Irene.

ML: And even some of her nieces and nephews called her that because other people - -

NL: came to learn with her.

ML: so they know her as teacher Irene - -

NL: That was the thing in Antigua, people would like go to someone's home to learn a trade, like sewing or cooking or something along those lines, needlework, something. People would, that was kind of an ethos of the generation that my parents grew up in, where you would learn trades. My grandfather, my mother's father was a mechanic by trade and he taught a lot of people, you know how to do auto body work [Crosstalk] and he was also a cab driver - -

ML: a cab driver and a driver for the former Prime Minister for a while also.

NL: Yea.

ML: So he did that for most of his life.

NL: Yea, cars were his life and ironically their last name was Car, so - -

ML: So, it's a big thing with our family.

NL: Yea

ML: Yea

NL: Yea, because we have uncles who are now - -

ML: into cars and auto body work, well my father was also.



NL: Yea, ironically my father learned auto body work as well but with someone else not with my mom's father.

ML: Yes, and my paternal grandparents, well my grandmother was a domestic for a long time.

NL: She worked in [crosstalk] well she worked as a domestic in Keriso and then she worked, I think she worked at the government house for a while too.

ML: She worked at the government house - -

NL: in Antigua

ML: in Antigua also in a domestic capacity. And my father's father as far as I know was a painter and he also did some work at a newspaper of some type.

NL: Yea.

BP: Now why was your paternal grandmother raising your father on her own? Did your grandfather pass away?

ML: Yes, [crosstalk] he passed away I believe at the time when my father was nine years old [crosstalk]. He passed away when he was very young. So they don't really know much of life with him - -

BP: Ok

ML: because his brother was a bit younger than he was - -

NL: Yes

ML: so.

BP: How long was his mother gone in Keriso and where else did she go?

NL: Dominicquo [crosstalk] which is where she was actually from.

ML: She was born in Dominicquo but she was raised in Antigua by her grandmother and her mother lived in Dominicquo as far as I know for most of her life. Well, I'm trying to remember your first question.

NL: It was like why why did you asked why did she - -

BP: I asked how long she was there - -

ML and NL: Oh, how long she was there.

NL: I don't know.

ML: I don't know, I've never, I know that she was gone for a good period of time because I think that my dad and his brother they were in their teens when she actually came back - -

NL: Came back, yea.

ML: But they were small when she was gone. That much I can recall.

NL: Oh, the other thing was too my grandmother also had a store - -

ML: Right.

NL: adjoining her house, where she lived. Which was - -

ML: My paternal grandmother

NL: Right, yea, yea my father's mother - -

BP: In Grey's - -

ML: In Grey's Park

NL: In Grey's Park

NL: Yea, she had a store [crosstalk]. And everybody knows her as Ms. Mildred who had the store on Tindale Road.

BP: What kind of store was it, just a - -

NL: Just a, oh, just a general store.

ML: General store, with goods, candy, flour, rice, all all, - -

NL: kind of like - -

ML: staples - -

NL: yea.

ML: That sort of thing. And she ran that store for well into our childhood I would say- -

NL: yea.

ML: before she moved us away.

NL: Yea, she ended up moving up here.

BP: So why did your, ok so your parents were not married in Antigua.

ML: No.

BP: And but they came in 1970 you said.

NL: Well my mom came in '70, my dad came in either '67 or '68 - -

ML: Because he - -

NL: My dad came up first.

ML: He left Antigua for a time to work before he came here [crosstalk], - -

NL: he didn't come straight here.

ML: He didn't come straight here. He went to the Virgin Islands.

NL: He lived in St. Croix - -

ML: St. Croix for a time - -

NL: All of West Indians actually did that, they went through the US Virgin Islands - -

ML: First.

NL: They kind of you know, make some American dollars and - -

ML: then migrate - -

NL: You know, start their whole naturalization process, too. And he worked in St. Croix at a hotel called The Great Tree Bay Hotel.

BP: How long was he there for?

NL: Probably about like two or three years [crosstalk] Yea, about two or three years, and then ended up in the Bronx.

ML: And then came here in the Bronx.

BP: Did your parents stay in touch with each other when he had gone to the Virgin Islands?

NL: Yea

ML: Yes, because he was going back and forth because my grandmother was back there and his younger brother and friends of course. So he was back and forth. And there were always in touch that I can tell.

NL: Yes.

BP: Why did your mother leave to come to the United States?

ML: Well she left to come to be married.

NL: Yea she came to be married

ML: She was working as a young woman at the - -

NL: Well first she was working at Bryson shipping - -

ML: Bryson shipping, which is a shipping company in Antigua. And then she went on to work at the local airline carrier, which is known as Leewood Islands Air transport - -

NL: Air transport

ML: Which is Leeat. And after that I guess she and my father had become engaged at that point, so then she came over to be married in 1970. She came to stay with her aunt who lived in Harlem.

NL: Yea, she had an aunt, my father, rather, my grandfather's sister.

ML: Sister.

NL: Her name was Merthie. And yea she used to live in Harlem and my mom stayed there with her. And my aunt was a member of the Antigua Progressive Society, so she was in touch with the whole Antiguan community.

BP: In Harlem?

NL: In Harlem and in the Bronx

BP: In the 19, rather, late 1960's?

NL: Oh yea, like Aunt Merthie had been here since the 50's - -

ML: 50's - -

NL: From what I understood - -

ML: Yea, she was here early - -

NL: Yea she was here a little bit earlier.

ML: And would come back to visit Antigua fairly often - -

NL: Yea, bring dresses - -

ML: dresses and goods and things like that and then when my mom decided to come to be married she stayed with her for a short time and not long after they married she died. I know that for sure.

BP: Your aunt?

ML: Yes. [crosstalk]

NL: great aunt, yea.

BP: What kind of work did your mother do when she came to the United States?

NL: She worked for the phone company - -

ML: the phone company, that is the one job - -

NL: That one job for thirty two years, until she retired last year.

BP: Wow.

NL: Yea, she started out as a 411 operator.

ML: And moved up the ranks.

NL: And moved up the ranks, yep.

ML: So that's been - -

NL: And worked all over New York City. They put her in offices in even Brooklyn, in Manhattan, in the Bronx, yep.

BP: What; now is it common for, you know, recent immigrants from the West Indies to be able to get that type of job?

ML: I think they just went for whatever job happened to become available. I think someone just told her about taking the examination to get into the phone company, and she did.

NL: Because it was a very secure kind of institution - -

ML: Job, and that was - -

NL: And you knew you would be taken care of if you worked at - -

ML: So she got the job and I don't know if it was exactly what she had tested for but it was the first thing that became available and she took it and she's been there ever, or she was there ever since.

NL: And she said she always wanted to be a teacher. And she thought about doing that but - -

ML: and she's always wanted [crosstalk] - -

NL: this opportunity presented itself so,

ML: Teaching may be in her future though, because she's always said she wanted to run her own daycare, that's always what she's said - -

NL: And that would be something she'd probably try to get into when she retires, and now she is and thinking about moving back to Antigua soon - -

BP: Oh, really?

NL: Yea, yea.

ML: It's always been her goal to go back home.

BP: And your father, was he a mechanic here in the States?

NL: Yea, that was one of the many things he got into. That was the first thing he did.

ML: That was the first, the main thing - -

NL: Yea, he opened up an auto body shop on Third Avenue. Ah, kind of like around, I would say like close to like the 149<sup>th</sup> St. area you'd think or a little, yea.

ML: It's right above where Grandma Mildred lived - -

NL: Yea - -

ML: Which is around 168<sup>th</sup> St.

NL: No, no wasn't he, I thought he was lower down on Third Avenue. His auto body shop was around there?

ML: His auto body shop, well I always called that area, it's all around, it's right around the corner once you go up that hill and go around the corner. Because it's not far from Morrisania Daycare Center, which is where I went to daycare, so - -

NL: Ok, so it's like Third Avenue by the 160 - -

ML: In the 160's.

NL: Ok, ok.

ML: So he opened an auto body shop and he wasn't the only Antiguan that had an auto body shop there, because he also had a good friend - -

NL: it was like a row - -

ML: it was a row - -

NL: of auto body shops - -

ML: of auto body shops, but before that he had, I think - -

NL: He had also those, I think it was at the same time, he had also opened a night club.

ML: Well, I think the night club was shortly after he had, he opened the body shop - -

NL: Yea.

ML: because he had a main contract with a company called Capital Motors, I don't know if they're still in existence now. And then he became, he became the night club owner, the Quartermoon Social Club, that was the name of his - -

BP: Where was that?

NL: Well, wasn't it like White Plains Road - -

ML: White Plains Road - -

NL: in the 200's.

ML: 200's



NL: like 220 something - -

ML: That was - -

NL: You know where like, like there seems to be like the primary side of the West Indian community now in the Bronx. Around there is where he had his night club.

BP: Do either of you know where he obtained the start-up capital for these businesses?

ML: I would say more than likely just his own savings and his own business savvy - -

NL: yea and the auto body work - -

ML: and the auto body work that he did, that would have been the start up capital for his business. And - -

NL: And the Quartermoon Social Club was always the place for Antiguan to hang out. Most, any Antiguan that you ask who came up here between '65 and '75 would say that they have been taken to my dad's nightclub at least once.

ML: Yes.

BP: Was he a partner in it, or was it just his?

ML: As far as I know he was the sole owner, yes. I recall going to the club as a young child and it was always very fascinating for me. I think the main thing for me was the spiral staircase leading up to the club and it was always very crowded. And, not only was it a social place for the Antiguan community but it always was a meeting place that they had major events happening. People would go there to gather and talk about - -

NL: things that were going on - -

ML: issues going on in the island - -

NL: as well - -

ML: important things like that.

NL: Like the prime minister came one time and - -

ML: used the venue as a meeting place. So a lot of people have gone through the doors of that club in particular. And he eventually ended up closing it down because the people that he rented the space from wanted to convert it into a church [Laughter]. Which I found so interesting, so that's kind of how it ended, the, the period of the nightclub.

BP: How long was it open for?

ML: I would say a couple years.

NL: Yea, I would say, I wouldn't say, like I estimated between, you know - -

ML: Four and five years.

NL: Yea, I would estimate about four or five years, like maybe the first like five years mom and dad were married. So like say '70 to '75.

BP: So where was the first place that your family lived?

ML: Well, my mother and father after they got married, they lived on Clay Avenue, in the Bronx in a small apartment - -

NL: It was a studio.

ML: It was studio apartment, but as they tell it, it probably was more than a studio for all of the people - -

NL: Yea, again, people, they would just you know pull apart a bed so someone would be sleeping on a mattress and someone would be sleeping on a box spring. All kinds of people would be, you know on the couch, like people who are just, again, because there was so many people there of their generation who were coming up and trying to get started, you know, in those early years, like of their marriage, you know. In the early '70's just about everyone that, you know, that my parents call friends, you know, of

their's, came around that same time. A lot of them came and stayed at their house first before finding somewhere else to live.

ML: And I know my father when he came here early on he was living with my uncle, my mom's brother, they were all living in an apartment building, I think, on Kelly Street or Fox Street or Olive Street, one of those streets over in that area. So you tend to find that when the Antiguan's were coming over in small batches they would tend to group up with other friends that they had already known, and at least kind of sleep on their couch, or sleep on their floor.

NL: Until they could get a place to rent - -

ML: Until they could get themselves established - -

NL: And, and find a job [crosstalk] and start their process. Yea. My godmother, you know, there's so many people that could say they slept on, you know, the Lightfoot's couch. [laughter] [crosstalk] Yes.

BP: So, now neither of you grew up on Conclay Ave.?

NL: No

ML: No

BP: So where - -

NL: They had moved to Clark Place - -

ML: 20 Clark Place.

NL: 20 Clark Place was the next place they lived in. And that was a much, you know, nicer apartment. It was right off the Grand Concourse, it was one of those, you know, kind of grand buildings, with the sunken living rooms and you know big just big space - -

ML: Big area, space.

NL: Yea.

BP: Is that where you grew up?

ML: That's where we grew up for the earlier part of our life.

NL: I was there till I was about four, and then that's when we moved to Castle Hill.

BP: Ok

NL: Yea.

BP: So 20 Clark Place is on the Grand Concourse [crosstalk] around what - -

ML: Around 170<sup>th</sup> Street.

NL: 170<sup>th</sup> Street. Yea.

BP: What was that neighborhood like as a child? What do you remember about it?

ML: As a child, very clean. It was very quiet I have to say, because it it, there weren't as many black families that I remember. It was more Irish building that I can remember.

Irish and I remember there were a few Slavic neighbors as well, because they weren't all Irish that I can remember. Well - -

NL: Who was that woman that used to take care of us that was - -

ML: Maria?

NL: Yea.

ML: Maria Adorno, she, I remember her - -

NL: Yea, she - -

ML: She had ah - -

NL: She was Puerto Rican, right?

ML: She was Puerto Rican.

NL: Yea - -

ML: So we had a - -

NL: There was a, there was a mix - -

ML: There was a mix, there was a mix of people in the building. It was a nice neighborhood, you had quite a number of families, it was really a family neighborhood.

BP: Ok. You stayed till you were about nine years old?

ML: Well, seven or eight. Because I was - -

NL: You were, because I was, because wait I was three going on for when we moved to, to Castle Hill - -

ML: Really?

NL: I remember that, because my fourth birthday party, was, remember we had like - -

ML: That was at - -

NL: We have pictures

ML: That was at right at - -

NL: Castle Hill

ML: So then yea, I would have been about eight - -

NL: Going on nine, yea.

ML: when we moved over that way.

BP: Did you have any friends that you remember?

ML: Remember?

BP: Yea.

ML: Sure, lots of friends. Because I had attended Christ the King School so, and before that Morrisania Daycare Center. So we had a lot of friends because we had Maria's kids

- -

NL: Yes.

ML: and we had a neighbor by the name of Rochelle, and she was pretty much my playmate because she was close in age to me.

BP: Was she, was her family West Indian as well? Or - -

ML: I don't remember what their background was - -

NL: But she was black - -

ML: But she was black, that much I do know, a lot of playmates because I think when we were growing up our parents' friends also - -

NL: Yea

ML: had children around our age.

NL: A lot of kids, you know - -

ML: And so they also were our playmates and party mates and things like that.

BP: Now was 20 Clark Place the same type of entry port for - -

NL: Antiguans - -

BP: Yea.

NL: to come to the US?

ML: I think that that particular neighborhood, it was. You had a lot of West Indians that in the early days were living around the Concourse.

BP: What would you say it was about your parents that made them the couple, or the people, that other Antiguans sought out for assistance upon arrival to the United States?

NL: I would say that was my dad - -

ML: I was just going to say that. [laughter]

NL: My dad would cut his own nose to help somebody else grow a nose. [laughter] I mean, he just always to help people, you know.

BP: Yes.

NL: And I think my mom would try to temper him and say, 'we can't have this many people staying in our place' [laughter] 'all the time,' you know. Like my mom tells a story about Michelle's first birthday party, which apparently lasted about three days. [laughter] Because again, my dad was a party person a social person he would tell everyone, you know, even though it was supposed to be just a kiddy birthday party. The next thing you know [crosstalk], the entire New York based Antiguan community was at my sister's first birthday party. Or like, well, remember your graduation party got shut down by the cops, the graduation party - -

ML: Security - -

NL: The graduation party from eighth grade - -

BP: The graduation from what?

NL: From eighth grade.

ML: The security, yea yea

NL: Her graduation from eighth grade.

ML: The security guards in our building were constantly coming to the door - -

NL: Yea and after a while shut it down - -

ML: Because so many people were flowing in and the music was really loud. But that was the way that my dad celebrated.

NL: Yea, he always did things big, and so that would, that would kind of like, you know my mom would, my mom was a little bit more she was social too she had a lot of friends,

but she's kind of like she didn't grow up in a home where it was like people came by like that so she didn't want to have a home like that either [laughter] but it was just hard to do with someone like my dad. [laughter] So, you know, in the end that would be a little point of tension for them, that you know, there was always so many people flowing through the place. But people always knew Lightfoot, you know, and they knew they could depend on him. Like to, you know, get them in touch with, you know - -

ML: Other people

NL: people, you know. To get, if you wanted to get in touch with a network of Antiguans, that was what - -

ML: He was the guy

NL: he was the go-to guy, you know, so that was kind of, that was I think what established the reputation of, well, you know, Lightfoot.

ML: They had a good network, I think back on the island as well. As a smaller island, as a smaller island essentially, many people knew one another, so - -

NL: And especially like places like Gray's Farm and Ottos where my mom and dad came from, you know, they're close to the capital, you know, they're in the capital. And the - -

ML: So many people know, they just know each other.

NL: So that's like a whole network of people who went to school, grew up, you know, worked their first jobs after high school before coming up to the States. All these people were around, were in and around villages that were in St. John's [crosstalk] so, again that whole network of people then came up here [laughter] and established a network in and around the Morrisania section of the Bronx. So - -



BP: Were either of your parents married before they married each other?

NL: No. No.

ML: Not that I'm aware of.

NL: No. But my dad had another, an older child, like we have an older brother, who lives in Antigua at the moment, yea.

ML: So he had one child before their union [crosstalk], but other than that

NL: Yea.

BP: So you moved to Clark Place and you stayed there until about 1982?

NL: 82, yea.

BP: And then you moved where?

NL: To Seward Avenue in Castle Hill, which is where we live now.

BP: Seward?

NL and ML: S-E-W-A-R-D, yea.

NL: And that's in a development called Jaime Towers, which is like a co-op - -

ML: Co-op

NL: Development.

BP: So it wasn't private homes? It was - -

NL: It's, they're buildings, apartment buildings - -

ML: It's apartment, it's a complex of four buildings but it is a residential neighborhood.

NL: And, and you know, it's like co-op style apartments, so it is a little bit different from a rented building in that people took a little more pride in preserving the buildings - -

ML: The integrity of it.

NL: because, they had piece, an ownership stake in these apartments, you know.

BP: Why did your parents move? Is this further north in the Bronx?

NL: Yea, it's further north. It's like you know kind of, Castle Hill is like, you would say the South East Bronx, like kind of in that, those, you know the water that separates like the Bronx from Rikers?

BP: Yes.

NL: That's kind of, that little area over there. And it's just above like Soundview, kind of, Castle Hill, Parkchester and Soundview are kind of all one area. So that's sort of the area they chose to live in.

ML: And I think - -

NL: I think it's because they knew that the Grand Concourse, that area, was kind of going down - -

ML: Yea, it was getting run down at that point when they decided to move. And too the family was growing because we were getting older and when they started out at Clark Place it was a one bedroom.

NL: Right.

ML: And - -

NL: Now that there was two of us - -

ML: Two of us and we were growing as children, they wanted to move us into a larger apartment. And, like we said, the neighborhood itself wasn't going in the forward direction at that point. So they decided to move to Castle Hill.

BP: Do you have, Michelle in particular, do you have vivid memories of some of the type of, you know, urban decay, you know, or housing desolation or what not that characterized the Bronx in the late 70's and early 80's?

ML: I don't, I don't feel that I, I recognized it as, maybe it was that but for me the experience didn't feel that way - -

BP: Ok.

ML: Maybe on the outside it may have looked that way to other people but I always had a very good sense of the Bronx. I felt that sense of community all of the time because I had my grandmother who took care of us during the day, my cousins and I, and - -

NL: But see it's funny, for me I would say, you know, when we moved to Castle Hill, my grandmother, my dad's mother, by that time was living here too. We didn't mention that, but she lived on the corner of 168<sup>th</sup> and Webster Ave. And I knew the difference between - -

ML: Oh, certainly.

NL: Castle Hill and Webster Avenue.

ML: Webster, oh yes.

NL: When we would go over there you could see how that was a very different section of the Bronx. And it wasn't [crosstalk], you know, I would say that you could see like a difference in the type of people that were around there - -

ML: Okay.

NL: and kind of a difference in the quality of the buildings in the neighborhood - -

ML: The buildings itself - -

NL: And the care that was [crosstalk] that was probably absent I think in even the way these buildings were maintained - -

ML: Maintained. I was going to say that you could see that and at that point my father was actually into the development of that particular block of buildings where my

grandmother was, so I think he, in a sense, wanted to kind of separate our, our living from the working environment in some ways, too.

NL: Yea, because at one point he also had, well, bought some buildings over on Webster Avenue and was, you know, leasing out the apartments and so - -

ML: And he had a store at one end of it too, so.

BP: So that's what you mean by "into the development?"

ML and NL: Yea, into the development

NL: Yea, he was kind of interested in developing - -

ML: In developing that area at least. And that was another way that he kept connected to the Antiguan community because he would rent to friends [crosstalk] the apartments there. And my grandmother actually lived in one of the apartments in one of the buildings. So that's where she watched us during the day, after school, my cousins and I.

BP: When you were speaking a little bit about Natasha knowing, noticing the difference between Castle Hill and Webster Avenue and 167<sup>th</sup> Street - -

NL: Yea, 168<sup>th</sup>, yea.

BP: So what, what did you notice was different about the people or the housing or the maintenance or the atmosphere or - -

NL: Well, I mean, I just, well first of all I would always get a sense that the people who were around Webster and 168<sup>th</sup> were, you know, I don't know I felt like they were, you know they were, because I was young. But you could just tell there was something wrong like, and it was probably, you know, addiction, you know what I mean. It was probably things like that like, but I also felt like you would see in the buildings like even in, like long after my father had, wasn't even owning those buildings over by Webster

Avenue you would see where whoever was owning them you know, would leave doors broken sometimes, like a door would be broken the glass would be shattered it would stay like that for days, weeks maybe.

BP: What kind of buildings are these?

NL: These are like - -

ML: Walkups

NL: Walkups, yea. Like tenement buildings, and you know, you would see like a lot of kids just playing out unattended, which was something you didn't see as much in Castle Hill. You know, you would see people on the corners more often. That's something that you didn't see as much in Castle Hill, you know. Not saying that you didn't see it at all, but I felt like of the two neighborhoods, Castle Hill was a little bit more and like I think that was probably early lessons for me in how neighborhoods differ by class. That's what I think that was for me. Because I knew the difference, you could tell when things were getting a little bit more run-down, because we would take the bus from my grandmother's, from my house to my grandmother's house. So we would take the 36 and then go to the corner of Tremont and Webster, that's where the 36 left off - -

ML: and take the 41 across.

NL: Take the 41 down Webster, to 168<sup>th</sup>, and you would see from the time you hit Tremont and it would go down, the changing of the character of the neighborhoods to me.

BP: Do you have anything to add Michelle?

ML: No, I guess in some ways I haven't thought about but listening to Natasha say it now; true. You do have some of those physical characteristics that you can say, you can

see the disparity between the two neighborhoods, but I think in the feeling for me, I think I was looking at it more from the feeling standpoint as opposed to the physical. You noticed the physical manifestations but for me it never felt run-down. I guess that's the way I always feel that there was a strong sense of community I guess. Despite the fact that it may have physically looked - -

NL: Yea, run down.

ML: Run down.

NL: Yea.

BP: Now, when your parents moved to Castle Hill were they, was your apartment still this first stop ground for Antiguans?

NL: Not as much - -

ML: I would say it's, I think it slowed, I think it slowed a bit. I think we were still social I think my dad was still social, he still had a lot of friends that came through. I think that's just his own personality, but I don't think it was a flow stop - -

NL: Yea it wasn't - -

ML: as much.

NL: Like people would be staying with us for weeks at a time [crosstalk].

ML: And I think that, that too was because there, we they were more as a family unit as opposed to just the two of them which they were early on in their lives.

BP: Where, what was Castle Hill like in terms of the people that lived there?

NL: It was mostly black American and Puerto Rican.

ML: Yes. Primarily.

NL: For the most part, a lot, mostly Puerto Rican I would say. But there were a good pocket of black Americans there. And, you know, we went to school, we went to school, St. John Vianney School on the corner of Castle Hill Avenue and Seward Avenue.

BP: How do you spell Vianney?

NL: V-I-A-N-N-E-Y. Yea.

ML: Catholic school.

NL: It was a Catholic grammar school. And I would say that school was again, outside of the principal who was Irish and a couple of the teachers who were Irish or Italian, you would generally find that, you know, the school was made up of Black and Puerto Rican, working and teaching [crosstalk]. I mean - -

ML: Just a few Caribbean - -

NL: Students

ML: Students.

BP: Ok, and that was, what was, did people get along pretty well in the neighborhood?

NL: Yea, I would say.

ML: Pretty well.

BP: Was it mostly working class, you know - -

NL: Yea it was working to middle class people.

ML: Working to middle class.

NL: Yea, working to middle class.

BP: Families and - -

ML: Families

NL: Definitely, definitely.

ML: And some larger families actually.

NL: Yea, and I think, you know, St. John Vianney School was the kind of school where, you know, like my sister, like everybody had more than one sibling in there at the same time. Like my sister was there and I was there at the same time. One of my dad's best friends from Antigua, his name was John Martin, all three of his kids were in the school at the same time.

ML: In school at the same time we were.

NL: Like little John was in my class.

BP: Little John?

NL: Martin. Yea his, John, he, John kind of fits basically because John Martin, my dad's friend was John Martin IV - -

ML: And this son was the fifth.

NL: John Martin V. He - -

ML: Was in class - -

NL: was in my class - -

ML: Anne Marie who was my best friend at the school was my aunt's friend and John's wife and her daughter was in my class and her older sister was in the class ahead of us.

NL: Right. We were like the Antiguans in the school.

ML: Of the multiple kids in the school, we were the Antiguans.

NL: We were the Antiguan matches at St. John Vianney. But then a lot of people I knew, like my best friend DeMaris, her family's from the Dominican Republic, her older sister went there.

BP: Ok.



NL: A girl I know, Deon, her mom taught there.

BP: Did DeMaris go there as well?

NL: Yea, DeMaris and her sister went there. DeMaris and her sister moved to Castle Hill from River Park Towers when I was in fifth grade. So, like, you know, they, you know, they were in the school around the same time as us too.

ML: You always had multiples.

NL: You always had people, it was like a family kind of school. Where people, you know, could, knew people in different classes and stuff like that. My neighbors, our next door neighbors, you know, all three of them went to that school.

ML: Three of their kids.

NL and ML: So we all knew each other.

NL: It was like generally a bunch of kids from the neighborhood who went to St. John Vianney.

BP: Why did your parents send you to St. John Vianney instead of public school?

NL: That was definitely my mom's choice - -

ML: That was - -

NL: All the way, she grew up - -

ML: Well I would say that was dad's choice too - -

NL: Dad's choice as well.

ML: Just in terms of my mother's education, she was - -

NL: On the island she was educated in the Catholic schools.

ML: And so she was a strong believer in the Catholic school education.

NL: And in religious education in general.

ML: And in religious education in general, and - -

NL: Even though our family was Anglican and they were very much about the idea of making sure well, Sundays in Antigua were always dedicated to church, all day long. It was like you would go to church services in the morning, you'd go to afternoon school or confirmation class or Sunday school or something. Night time there'd be evening song so you would spend the entire day engaged in religion, it's a very religious family so they would want for us to have a religious education - -

ML: Background and education. At that time the public school [crosstalk] wasn't, it didn't have the appeal in some senses - -

NL: At least to the West Indians - -

ML: Where my father, who had a West Indian family - -

NL: Who trying to make sure that their kids came in and did better than they did. Which was - -

ML: And so, it, to me, I don't think there was a choice in the matter, it was just natural that we were going to go to, if not a Catholic school then a private school.

NL: Yea, it was going to be something were they felt like - -

ML: certain curriculum - -

NL: There's a certain amount of accountability I think teachers have when you're paying for the school, you know. There's a certain amount of like care that goes into teaching and also the class sizes usually smaller too. I just had the conversation the other day with someone. It's like, you know, public schools here especially thinking about the eighties, in the Bronx, you know I don't think that the teachers cared as much. And you know,

even though, you know, West Indians like my parents and stuff had just arrived it didn't take long for them to pick up on that. That a public school education - -

ML: I had friends who would have already told them - -

NL: Less than better - -

ML: You know, told them about certain things within the system. So they would have already figured out that this is not the route that they would have wanted to take. And, so as I always tell people, I don't know the public school education, I can only speak from the Catholic school standpoint because that's what I know.

BP: When did you and your family start attending St. Andrew's Episcopal Church?

ML: Not long after we moved to Castle Hill, because we, my parents got married in Trinity Episcopal Church and we were baptized there, and - -

BP: Where is Trinity, it's in - -

ML: It is at Morris and - -

NL: 166<sup>th</sup>?

ML: It's right across from Morris High School, Morris High, no, umm, yes it's right over there near Morris High School. And - -

BP: Oh yes, yes, yes, it is right - -

ML: It's right near Morris High School and after that, because they were closer to Clark Place they attended St. Simeon's because that was the local Episcopal Church - -

NL: Over there.

ML: Over in that area of the Bronx. And once we moved over to Seward Avenue my mom was still going back to St. Simeon's and a friend of her's who had also attended St.

Simeon's, Camalita Turner, told her that there was an Episcopal church not far from where we lived and said, "Oh, you might want to try it." And so - -

NL: Because she kept trying to contend with the kids going to, on the bus - -

ML: Take them on the bus or take them in the car across the way to St. Simeon's why do you try it.

BP: Right.

ML: And so one Sunday my mom actually, just and she said, "you know it's funny I never went in the direction of St. Andrew's but that one Sunday I decided to go in another direction," up the street as opposed to down and she went to St. Andrew's and she has never left.

BP: Right

ML: And we've never gone back to St. Simeon's.

BP: Now did your father attend church as well, or was - -

ML: He would on occasion, he wasn't an every Sunday-goer like my mom, but on occasions he would come with us.

NL: Yea, he liked to spend Sundays watching *Like It Is*, with Gill Nobel, that was his show.

ML: Yea, that was his time to catch up on - -

NL: Yea, that was his time to be like, yea - -

ML: Walter Vince - -

NL: Yea, he was a very like, he was very much interested in like politics and history.

And I didn't understand it, but now I realize how much I'm like him in that way, - -

ML: And I realize that, too [laughter].

NL: Yea, everyone always tells me that out of all his kids I'm like, you know, I'm the most like him. And I think that, you know, and I think when I was younger I just didn't understand it and I used to like pray that he wouldn't call me in to front of the TV [laughter] to watch something real heavy and serious like *Like It Is*.

ML: We often did, we often did, by the time we got back on a Sunday - -

NL: Oh lord.

ML: of any particular television program that had a historical or - -

NL: Daddy would just be like, "come in here."

ML: "Come on." And - -

NL: Oh man! We got school tomorrow no body is trying to do this today [laughter].

ML: But sure enough, today - -

NL: Now I'll just sit up - -

ML: And we'll just do it.

NL: When I was something like eight years old, daddy tried to get me to watch *Roots*, and I was like, I don't think I want to do this right now, this is a little heavy. But now I understand the importance of this because he would say stuff like, "you're not learning this in school."

BP: Yes.

ML: Right.

NL: So sit down here and watch this. And now, that's what I do for a living and that's very much because of his influence.

ML: It shaped us in ways that we didn't understand then, but we certainly do now. Like our appreciation for historical things or things like jazz, because he was a big jazz aficionado.

NL: A big jazz person. He loved jazz music.

ML: He loved to play that on the weekends - -

NL: And that was his Sunday morning activity. When we would be at church he would be at home reading the paper, watching *Like It Is*, - -

ML: Relaxing - -

NL: You know, playing Jimmy Smith was one of his favorite jazz musicians, he's an organ player. Or he liked Sonny Rollins, he liked a lot of Billie Holiday, Nat King Cole - -

ML: Nat King Cole, Billie Holiday.

NL: Diana Washington. He had a lot of those old jazz records.

BP: What does your mother like?

NL: She likes a lot of like, you know, kind of like Whitney Houston, that kind of - -

ML: Aretha Franklin - -

NL: You know, easy listening type stuff [laughter] and then gospel music and church hymns, you know.

ML: And all of that was also peppered with their own Antiguan, certainly Caribbean music, - -

NL: Certainly a lot of soca.

ML: That was big, a lot of soca, a lot of reggae all those sorts of things.

NL: Yea, you would hear a lot of like old time Calypso. From Antigua the big artists were like King Short Shirt, King Obstant, they had these really cool stage names [crosstalk]. And these were like my father's friends. So like I could remember King Obstant coming to our house when were growing up. So that was like a thing, you know - -

ML: And because he was also running the nightclub at that point - -

NL: That was like - -

ML: They would come to his club to play.

NL: So yea, Obstant, we don't know if Obstant was Obstant.

ML: We don't know that - -

NL: But I know for sure - -

ML: But that was his stage name - -

NL: Short Shirt used to wear a short shirt on stage. [laughter] That's when he was named Short Shirt [laughter].

ML: I mean, there was Swallow - -

NL: Swallow was a big one - -

ML: Was a big one - -

NL: Huge one.

ML: Sparrow was a big one, I don't think Sparrow was from Antigua, but - -

BP: I'd like to maybe move into a little bit of, if we have time, how often did you go back to Antigua as children [laughter]?

ML: [Laughter] That's a, That's a - -

NL: Oh man - -

ML: That's a fun story at our house, because [laughter] when we were younger I think with classmates as the summer season would roll around you would be telling one another what you're going to do for the summer so it was always a big thing at our to say, "Oh, so and so is going to Disneyland, why aren't we going - -

NL: Why can't we go to Disneyworld?

ML: Why can't we go to Disneyland?

NL: We want to go.

ML: But my maternal grandparents and my paternal grandmother always felt that when the kids were off from school it was time to send home - -

NL: There was one place only [laughter]

ML: To Antigua. So each year we would kind of plead for the Disneyland run - -

NL: We would always, we were like "Come on"

ML: And each summer they would make an equally large plea for us to come to Antigua - -

NL: You're going home to your people [laughter]

ML: And sure enough, even though Disneyland was there because that was always my parents' argument, they'll always be there. And so we went home to Antigua for our summers.

BP: Every summer?

NL: Every summer.

ML: Every summer I can remember.

NL: For every summer that we have been alive we have been to Antigua - -

ML: Yea, we have been to Antigua at least once.



NL: And there was one time when I was about maybe like 3 years old, I went to Antigua for a couple months, like probably for about a good three or four months, let's say. And this is the funniest story because like when I came back, apparently during that time my sister and my dad came down to visit but my mom didn't come. So, it was funny my mom would always send us in cheap, for a while like there was a good stretch of time where she didn't go back herself she would just send us.

ML: Right.

NL: But, so yea, my mom didn't come during that time, my dad and my sister came. So when I came back after those three or four months I didn't remember my mother.

BP: Oh no. [laughter]

NL: And my mother was so hurt, she was crushed, I just it just I guess I, you know?

BP: What'd you say, who are you?

NL: Yea like I think I did say it was something like that. You know, who is this daddy? [laughter] And it was like a problem, you know? My mom was crushed then she realized she shouldn't spend that much time away from me ever again. [laughter] And I came back with an accent, that's what she said that I came back with an accent.

ML: Strong accent - -

NL: Strong Antiguan accent.

ML: I remember that strongly, she did have a very strong accent. And before she left, Natasha that is, she didn't like bread and she loved bread by the time she came back because bread is a big staple in Antigua.

NL: Yea, like people just make bread at bakeries every day.

ML: Fresh baked bread every day.

BP: So today is November 22, 2004 we're continuing the Bronx African American History Project's interview with Michelle and Natasha Lightfoot. So again if you could each say your name for the record so we can distinguish between the voices.

NL: Natasha Lightfoot.

ML: Michelle Lightfoot.

BP: So I'd like to go back a little bit and discuss your memories of your father's kind of social and political networks. Because in the earlier interview, you know, we got a very clear picture about in some ways how your parents' different apartments in the Bronx were a starting point for a lot of Caribbean, and Antiguan migrants in particular migrants to the USA. And also how he was a small business owner owning a club and what not. I'm just curious was he, in Antigua while in Antigua or even in the US, was he a part of any social or political organizations that would have kind of made him that person that people would contact?

NL: Well I would say that membership in an organization, not exactly. But he was a staunch supporter of the Antiguan Labor Party. And the Antiguan Labor Party is a party that kind of came out of the early trade union movement that were a part of you know like let's say the first 30 to 40 years of the twentieth century they were kind of the beginning adjitators for what you know for worker's rights because obviously in the you know in plantation systems like in the Antiguan and other parts of the British Caribbean you know there were all these sugar plantations and they were primary employers of most black people in the working class and you know they, it was illegal to unionize. So there was a whole push to kind of break that kind of stuff down and so some of the early trade unionists became kind of national heroes after a while when they were able to get

secure certain rights for workers and eventually even oust some of the British colonial planters and get some of these plantations owned by you know local, local owners and even what becomes the government, the Antiguan government you know in kind of the later period when it becomes a commonwealth. So it's sort of like the provisional independence. When you become a commonwealth it's not like you're fully independent but you're like a step there. So kind of the trade union movement from that movement came out, came some political parties and the most, the primary political party that came out of it was the Antiguan Labor Party. And my father was a really staunch member of the Labor party and supported a lot of the you know, leaders who came out of that movement - -

ML: And were friends with them.

NL: And became friends with them. He was friends with a lot of the politicians who occupied major positions in the cabinet. He knew the Prime Minister very well, he knew the Prime Minister's son who became the Prime Minister after the first Prime Minister died. You know he knew a lot of those people and he did a lot of campaigning for them when he was in Antigua and also up here. And because a lot of Antiguan here exercised their right to vote in Antigua even when they were still living here.

ML: And they had a close - -

NL: They had close connections - -

ML: Connections.

NL: So it was really important to do a lot of work up here for the, you know as far as getting you know the people who were here very connected politically. To what's going on in the island.

BP: What ways did they create networks to enable this connection to continue here in the Bronx?

ML: Well I think frequent visitation back and forth, I would say local papers sending back local newspapers - -

NL: That's something a lot of people did.

BP: From Antigua?

ML: From Antigua to New York.

BP: What were some of the names of those papers?

ML: I would say well - -

NL: The Outlet

ML: The Outlet, let's see what the name of the paper that, before the Antigua Sun because it's currently the major papers are the Outlet, the Antigua Sun and the Daily Observer. But at that time I'm trying to remember the other papers that were existent around that time, I can't remember names off the top of my head.

NL: I know the Outlet was one of them.

ML: The Outlet's definitely one because that's pretty old.

NL: I think, is the Observer old too or no?

ML: They're a recent publication, but people who were, who are integral in that paper now were integral in the process back then of creating the publication back then.[crosstalk] And I would certainly say just regular dialogue between people that really kept the news flowing and going.

NL: Yea, my dad even tells a story about one time when you know like the then Prime Minister, B.C. Bird is his name, Beara Cornwall Bird and he and some of the other

members of what you know became his first cabinet were up here and the first place they were told they needed to go to was my father's club. And my father had a big fundraiser for the AOP at his club. And he you know talks about how you know everybody was there. Anybody who's a who's who of you know of Antiguan society that happened to be in New York at the time was there.

BP: So the Prime Minister of Antigua went to your father's club.

NL: Yes, yes and he also went to our house.

ML: He also came to our house.

NL: This is when we were living at Clark Place on the Concourse.

BP: Now how did your father you know, establish these relationships? He was a mechanic by trade right?

NL: He was a mechanic by trade but you know, you have to understand first off that Antigua's a very small place. And everyone knows everyone, you know, people can - -

ML: - - [crosstalk] people's lives intersect - -

NL: - - yeah exactly, and especially if you grew up in areas in or around St. John's or just the capital, most people who live in villages in that immediate vicinity that grew up in the forties, fifties, and sixties and ended up in high school at the same time or grammar school at the same time or ended up in the same churches, they all know each other - -

ML: - - [crosstalk] from church to church - -

NL: - - And so those people, all these different networks are formed on the island - -

ML: - - the collide - -

NL: - - and we're not talking about a place as big as The Bronx. Antigua at that time, right now it only has about seventy thousand people on the island, so back then, we're

only talking about fifty thousand people, and then of those maybe like around St. John's we'd probably get like six thousand people we're talking about. So when you pair it all down from there to a certain generation of people who are all around the ages we're at now - -

ML: - - [crosstalk] they would have all gone to school together, played sports together, their parents may well have been friends and I could say certainly you get that sense - -

NL: Because, I mean, if I think about the age my dad was, my dad was born in forty-two, he came up here in sixty-eight let's say, so he's twenty-six years old, I'm twenty-six now. And think about how many people I know that are all in New York at the same time who are twenty-six kind of just out of school, that kind of thing, it's an even smaller group of people. So the networks were already there and it also was kind of a thing to do to end up in New York looking for further opportunities so a lot of Antiguans were coming - -

ML: - - and they came in groups. And one person would tell the next "oh I'm coming" or "X is here and Y is there".

BP: If you could remind me, what was your father's parents occupation?

ML: His mother was a domestic and his father was a painter and a newspaper man, that I know of. Because he died very young, my father didn't have as many details

BP: And how far did your father go in his education?

NL: High school, and he didn't finish it - -

ML: I was going to say middle school, like early highschool - -

NL: [crosstalk] yeah he probably went up to about maybe ninth or tenth grade

BP: And when and how did he receive his training as a mechanic?

ML: there on the island [crosstalk] it was common for young women to learn a trade. They would go to someone who was more skilled or someone who was established as a particular thing, maybe as a clerk or like my grandmother was a seamstress, my mother's mother - -

NL: [crosstalk] She would have taken in a couple of girls and showed them how to sew. So he went to a guy named Steven R. Mendes. And Mendes is actually spelled M-E-N-D-E-S, just reminding you, people always Anglicize Portuguese last names, well this guy was probably Portuguese by descent. Steven Mendes, but they called him Menz instead of Mendes, which is what you should have called him if you were pronouncing it properly. And that's who he learned the auto-body trade with. And after that, he ended up at this hotel in St. Croix

ML: as a way stop before coming to the states to pursue his own trade.

BP: So was he involved in the Antigua Labor Party to some degree as a young man in Antigua? Do you know?

ML: I would say that's where it started, I think that as he grew in adulthood here, it became more viable in a sense because he was here working with people who are also attached to the Labor Party there at home and I would say once he returned - -

NL: - - that's the other thing we haven't really gotten to, his life story ends with him returning to Antigua and he decided to do that in eighty-nine I think, or ninety- -

ML: - - no earlier - -

NL: [crosstalk] eighty-eight

ML: it was my second year of high school when he decided to return home

NL: that was because he wanted to open up another business. After he started the whole auto-body thing and the club, then he bought the buildings, then he sold the buildings, closed the clubs, got into construction work, he used to work for Prute Construction for a long time, and then moved from there and started thinking about how much that kind of work could be lucrative in Antigua, so his designs were to go to Antigua and start a quarry business. And that I think was a pretty stressful business for him. My mom decided she didn't want us to go because she wanted us to stay here and see us through our education, so it was pretty difficult for our family, it was a difficult decision because he knew he wanted to go, he wanted to start his life down there and she wasn't ready, and she wasn't ready for us to leave school and start school down there so she stayed here, stayed behind, but they were still married.

BP: How often did they get to see each other?

ML: My dad would come up mostly during holidays he would come up. Because he was starting the business, it wasn't as easy initially but he would try to get back on the holidays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and during the summers we would always go down so we would see each other maybe twice, three times a year at that point, but frequent phone calls of course over the weekends and times during the year, that's kind of how we kept up.

NL: So he went back and then he really became more instrumental in trying to work with labor party leaders, doing campaigning for them. Like for example our uncle Rodney, we call him uncle Rodney, his name is Rodney Williams he used to minister education and he used to campaign in a parish called St. Paul - -

BP: - - In Antigua?



NL: - - in Antigua, and my father was like his primary campaign manager

ML: - - and they've been good friends for all of my life.

BP: Did your mother participate in or contribute to political organizing in a similar way

NL: No - -

ML: - - No, I think that mom had just, she kind of kept her political vision quietly I would say. I don't think she was a political frontrunner the way that my father was. I think she supported him in his political leanings.

NL: She dedicated more of her activities to working with the church. She did a lot of stuff with St. Andrew's which is something we'll get to in a little bit, St. Andrew's is very integral to our upbringing. So that was kind of where she put most of her energy and free time, as oppose to my dad who was a little more interested in kind of the political stuff. And people actually told him he should've run for office but he never did

BP: I just want to try to, before moving away from your father a little bit, I do want to just maybe try to ask maybe in a different way if there was ever any sharing as to how he might have developed these ambitions or met these people, because not everybody who had the rudimentary formal training that he had in education or, I'm sure not everybody who followed the same craftsman approach that he had was able to develop the personal relationships with people who attain high seats of power. So I'm wondering if he ever shared in any way - -

ML: - -how that happened?

NL: - - he was a charismatic person [crosstalk]

BP: - - did he know these people

NL: I think some of it is, Brian, [laughter] - -

ML: - - His own verbs, just his own fire I think, that was just - -

NL: - - If you think about me Brian, because everyone tells me that out of his kids, I'm the most like him, I'm a really social person, and everywhere I go, it just turns out that I know people, [laughs] and you know, my father was the same way. Everywhere I go and I say the name Lightfoot while in a group of Antiguan people, it's like 'oh you're Cleeve Lightfoot's children? Oh you're kidding'. That happened at the funeral that we just went to this weekend for an Antiguan woman. As soon as we're there, if you say the name Lightfoot, people are still giving us condolences and he passed away three years ago. Every time we say Lightfoot, it's like 'oh he was such a great man', he was a real people person. I live on 127<sup>th</sup> street now in Harlem, and there are a couple of Antiguan guys who are working on renovating a brownstone down the street from my house. They saw me one time with an Antigua wristband and they said 'oh you're Antiguan, who are your people?' And as soon as I said Lightfoot, this one guy said 'oh he used to own the club! Oh I know that guy he's a great guy, oh he's from [?] oh I know him. He's a people person. He is a man of the people'. And that was the thing that I think really made him something that a person that people would latch onto and kind of gravitate toward. He was always very forthcoming with his political opinion. He was a smart person even though he didn't have the kind of education [crosstalk], formal education, he was a real smart person in terms of common sense and even had such an interest in world events. He told me one time we sat down and we talked about his younger days and he said to me that some of the guys he came up with, they were really aware of world racial politics and the things that were going on in the late 60's and early 70's. Black Power affected them. Things like what was going on in South Africa affected them. When he mentioned the

fact that he was really upset about the things that P.W. Bofa was doing in South Africa, I thought 'wow, I didn't even know you knew that'. In little Antigua, you were aware of what was going on in the rest of the world. I think that was a time when a lot of young black people were being awakened and wanted to get politically involved just in general. So some of that is why I could explain some of his [?] but I also think it's just a natural drive that he had to want to learn more and know more even though he might not have been educated. And I think even that some of the stuff that I do now, I think he would love to have the opportunity to do this type of stuff because he was a natural historian [laughs]. You know what I mean? - -

ML: - - That's a good way to describe him

NL: He knew a lot about a lot of things and even without the kind of research and archival stuff that we do as trained historians. He didn't do any of that, but he still had such a real integral knowledge of history and the past. - -

ML: - - I think you find that a lot with men and women of Antiguan time. Of that particular generation, they are very broad, though they may not have had the formal training or schooling, they just seemed to have those aspirations to become - -

NL: And they also just know a lot. There are a lot of these older guys that are probably in their late 50's, early 60's now, my dad would have been 63 this coming April. Those guys all in his set, when you here them sit down and talk at a rum shop in Antigua, they can talk for hours and they know every little thing about every political change, every little moment in the last 40 years in Antiguan political history, they know it. - -

[crosstalk]

ML: - - And that's one of the best things about the Antiguan get-together. I think that's one of their strongest points. They love to get together and talk about what's going on, especially about Antigua. It's a favorite pastime, getting together and talking about what's happening on the Island - -

NL: - - Political, social, economic, and certain [?] make it possible here. There are a couple of women who have thriving trades where they cook traditional Antiguan foods on Saturdays and sell it. This one woman, my godmother's sister, she sells food at an auto-body shop on Third Avenue, kind of close to where my dad's old auto-body shop used to be. And that is an Antiguan gathering spot.

ML: There is another spot called the Coalation, and men get together and talk. Their also a kind of union, if you will, of workers here in New York, but they also get together, mostly Antiguans, and talk about - -

NL: - - and they mostly work in construction

ML: And they get together during the week at this particular establishment and they talk about it. [crosstalk] There's also the L.A. Bakery - -

NL: - - on Freeman Street

ML: it's called the Little Antigua Bakery, and during the week they sell baked goods, and on the weekends especially when people are free, people get together, they talk there.

BP: Freeman and what?

NL: what is it, Freeman and what?

ML: I would say, what's that, Westchester Avenue going all around?

NL: NO, is that Boston Road - -

ML: Boston Road, over there on Boston Road. [crosstalk]

NL: Yeah, it's by Freeman and Boston Road. Those are the kind of places where you can go, you can find out information on what's happening in Antigua. You can find out about social events that are happening, here among Antiguans. There's this big Soka[?] band called The Burning Flames that everybody from Antigua is really into so when they come up here and play, you can get your Burning Flames tickets at the Little Antigua Bakery on Freeman Street. Or you can hear about it if you're at the Coalation or if you're at the Auto-body shop on Third Avenue. Somehow people are always in touch.[crosstalk]

ML: You can find an outlet for information.

NL: And so just to kind of wrap things up on, cause I feel like the conversation is going so far off course, but just to get back to dad, in some ways dad was an extraordinary person, but in some ways he's just "run of the mill" because many of the people are just the same way in terms of their political involvement and their alliance with, even though they're here, they're still very much allied with what's going on at home.

BP: Were his businesses successful? Did they return profit?

NL: I would say the auto-body shop. I think that would be his most successful venture, if I were going to categorize or rate them, I would say that was the thing that was the catalyst for everything else he took on here and abroad, so I would say that was his starting point and that was his most successful venture.

BP: Why did he close down the club?

ML: I think I said earlier in the interview, [crosstalk] but maybe I didn't say that. The people that he leased the club from, they wanted to convert the space into a church. So that is why he ultimately decided to close it down and I think he just wanted to get into

other ventures so maybe that was a good avenue to start another venture, once they wanted their property back - -

NL: And I think he got rid of the building on Webster Avenue because they became more headache and they were [worth?]

BP: What happened to the rock quarry business?

NL: Well that, I think, going back to Antigua was, I think it was a difficult decision for this whole family, but I think it was difficult for him to actually get a strong footing there.

ML: Right because there were already major businesses in play when he also came with a similar business type to begin with. I knew that he tried his best and he got a little ways in, but it still became difficult as a one man operation to run a business of that magnitude.

BP: How did his return affect your family?

NL: Well I could say I know for me I was really upset that my dad had to leave, but I was just like, 'why aren't you here, you should be here with us'. And I didn't understand that he was trying to do something to try to set things up for later, but unfortunately he didn't live long enough to even see all of that through because he died in 2001 suddenly from a heart attack, so that just kind of snapped up everything and kind of put everything to a crashing halt, but at the time, I just thought well, daddy should just be here. Our family should just be together and I just, you know, when he would call or he would come, I would just be like 'well are you going to come back now?' And I was probably about ten when he left, so I really was just like, I didn't understand. Michelle was a little older so she was a little bit more okay with it

ML: I think I was a little more open to it because I think I saw that he really wanted to try to establish something. I think I could probably understand that greater than Natasha could at a younger stage that maybe this was a way for him to fulfill something that he wanted to see us have in the future and that's what he used to always talk about.

NL: I think that that was his greatest desire always, to see that our family was taken care of, even if he had to lengths where he wouldn't be with us every single day as we might have wanted as Natasha said. As a young child I do remember Natasha always asking 'are you going to come back, are you going to come back?' I think I understood more that there was a reason for the separation, a greater reason, so I didn't have the same expectation that she might have early on. It was a bit of a tough time for my mom because Natasha was still younger than I was, I was older, but still you have children raising and you need that support from day to day, so I think that that may have played a bit of a factor, made it a greater stress for my mom, but I think she knew also that she needed to take care of us and take care of herself and it was a goal of both of our parents that we did well. So it was important for her to keep the family strength going.

BP: How did she do that?

ML: I think just keeping us on the right academic path, keeping us motivated and active not only in school, but outside activities, going to dance classes, going to art classes

BP: Did she work at the time?

ML: Yeah, she worked at [crosstalk] [various companies?]

BP: Who took you to school? Who picked you up?

NL: Michelle always took me to school because we went to the same grammar school

BP: Was Natasha on time in the morning?

NL: NO! [laughs]

ML: Sometimes pretty close.

NL: We were never on time for school! [laughs]

ML: We were on time pretty well

BP: Since we're on the historical record, I'm curious just as to why that is. [laughter]

NL: Well let me put it this way - -

BP: - - For prosperities purpose.

NL: - - For prosperities purpose, [laughs]

ML: It's just a family trait

NL: It's a family trait from my dad I think. I think my mom is pretty more timely - -

NL: - - No she's not! Mommy is late everywhere too! But daddy is just later!

ML; He enjoyed making an entrance so I think that may have had something to do with it - -

NL: - - Please, that was my father's thing I could tell you.

ML: Our school was in sight of our apartment building, so my mom could watch us go to school - -

NL: And we would underestimate the amount of time that it would take to get up there [laughs].

ML: Yes, so she could see us go to school from where we lived - -

BP: Is this on Clark Place?

NL: No this is actually in Castle Hill but when I was younger going to school, my mom took me to school or my aunt, because we didn't mention that before. My aunt, when I was a young child, came up from Antigua, my aunt Gweneth, and she was my primary



caretaker during the day, so she would take me to school, my dad would take me to school in those early years, so - -

BP: What was your address in Castle Hill?

NL: [crosstalk] [26-80?] Seward Avenue. S-E-W-A-R-D. Yeah, it was funny because mommy always had a 10 to 6 shift, so she could be with us in the mornings

BP: And what did you do after school?

NL: And then after school, we basically, I would come home with Michelle, and we took care of ourselves. We were latch-key kids.

ML: I guess we would call it by this standard latch-key kids, but - -

BP: - - What year did you move to Castle Hill

ML: - - [crosstalk] 1982

BP: So your father was around

NL: Yeah, my father was there for at least as far as six or seven years

BP: '82, you were very young; you don't have any memories of Clark Place.

NL: No, I do, I actually do. I have some very faint memories.

BP: But most of your life was spent on Seward Avenue.

NL: But most of my life was spent on Seward Avenue. Yes, and I know for sure living in Castle Hill for me was fun. It was like a neighborhood filled with kids. And a lot of them all went to St. John Vianney's or P.S.138, there were a couple of schools around the area and everybody knew everybody. A lot of people lived in the complex we lived in, which is called Jamie Towers, a four co-op building, and that was just like, it was a pretty cool experience. The co-op had a pool and a park. The pool would be open in the

summer time and that was like a meeting of the minds. Entire amount of all the kids in Castle Hill, all of them would be in the pool at Jamie Towers during the summer.

BP: What kind of housing was this? Was it private co-op?

NL: Yeah, Yeah it's a private co-op.

BP: There was no government subsidy at all?

NL: Not that I know of

BP: So your parents owned the co-op?

NL: Yeah, Yeah. And the park had a, well we used to call it a mountain, but really it's like two big rocks [laughs]. [crosstalk] We used to feel like mountain climbers when we would play on that thing. [laughs]

ML: Well that's what we called ourselves, I'll say that

NL: We used to call it the mountain. We would tell people meet us by the mountain'

ML: And everybody knew, and everybody knew

NL: It's so not a mountain, but it seemed so big when I was like six you know? Oh man those were the days.

BP: You both went to St. John Vianney, how do you spell Vianney?

NL: V-I-A-N-N-E-Y

BP: You both went there at the same time for a little while?

ML: Yes

NL: I was there till 1991, Michelle was there till '87

ML: Righ, I attended 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades there.

NL: And I was there from basically 1<sup>st</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. And the school was a pretty small school, there was only one grade per class.

BP: And most of the kids were from Castle Hill?

NL: Yes

BP: Who lived in Castle Hill when you moved there in '82?

NL: Yeah, mostly African Americans and Puerto Ricans. There were very few Dominicans. Only now are you seeing more Dominicans in the neighborhood, and there were pockets of West Indians.

ML: Pockets of West Indians, pockets of Irish and Italians who had lived there - -

NL: - - Who were part of the old time Castle Hill because Castle Hill used to be a primarily Italian and Irish neighborhood. It was kind of like the offshoot of Parkchester, and you know the history of Parkchester. Parkchester is an area that used to be like - -

ML: - - is a Catholic center - -

NL: - - Yeah, an orphanage, and then they converted it to apartment complexes. And there's actually in those series of emails that Mark Naison was sending out to the [?] about racism on The Concourse, somebody was talking about racism in housing in The Bronx in general and some of the places that were mentioned in that email, Tracey and Parkchester. Those two condominiums, co-op/condominium developments were really big when they first came out as places that people went to and thought they were moving on up.

BP: Jamie Towers.

NL: Jamie Towers was the co-op that we moved into. So yeah, Castle Hill, blacks and Puerto Ricans.

BP: So who were your neighbors in Jamie Towers?, Who else lived on your floor?

NL: A white woman named Ms. Gracey, Gracey Verrone. She's again old, Italian - -

ML: - - She has lived in the complex since it began.

NL: - - Yeah, she's probably the only person [crosstalk]- -

ML: - - She and the [Miraviles?] down on the first floor are the two original sets of people because they always talk about that. They are the two sets of people who lived in our apartment complex since it opened. We had an African American family that lived directly across from us, the Mackintoshes. We had, I would sat they are a Latino family, [crosstalk], Eva and Emily and their father at that point I can't remember their last name right now, but they were Latino. Then there was Yvonne next door, [a big] African American woman, and then Ms. Naomi down the hall, who was Jamaican - -

NL: So there's a whole cross section of different types of people that were just on our floor even.

BP: IN your circles of friends, did you both share similar circles of friends?

ML: I would say yes.

NL: Usually the little brothers and sisters of Michelle's friends were in my classes, so that's how. The Mackintoshes next door had three sons: Mickey, Kyle, and Mark. Mickey was about 2 or 3 years older than I was, Kyle was 2 or 3 years younger than me, and Mark, he was in my class.

ML: So we were all friends, Ms. Naomi had a son named - -

NL: - - Damiam, he's a year younger than me, he was in always the class behind me. [crosstalk].

ML: We all went to St. John Vianney together.

NL: There was another Antiguan family, the Martins. All three of their kids went to school at St. John Vianney too. They lived a little bit further down on Lafayette Avenue

kind of close to Soundview Park. Now the youngest son was in my class, the middle daughter was in Michelle's class [crosstalk] and her older sister was a year ahead. So this all [crosstalk]. Demara was my best friend, she was in my class, her sister was a year behind Michelle. So many people.

BP: It seems like there was an ethnic mix of young people, Latino, African American, and Caribbean, what were some of the ties the cultural maybe, or stylistic ties that bound, or even just games, or what bound this [eclectic] group of young people together, what did you do? [laughs] What games did you play?

NL: Red light green light - -

ML: - - Tag - -

NL: - - Freezetag was major, freezetag was so serious

ML: racing

NL: Yeah, relay racing was big

ML: Ball, basketball, dodgeball was scary [laughs]

NL: Jumping rope

ML: Yeah, like double-dutch, things like that

NL: [crosstalk] We would play a lot of games in the John Vianney yard and also in

Jamie Towers - -

ML: - - In the park, swings, hop-scotch - -

NL: - - Hop-scotch was huge too - -

ML: - - There was a hop-scotch board on the ground, stickball, they had a - -

NL: - - Stickball Boulevard was two blocks behind our house

BP: Did girls play stickball

ML: NO, I don't remember girls playing stickball, mostly guys. There was Stevenson High School they had a track there across the street - -

NL: - - and that's where we learned to play tennis, my aunt taught us how to play tennis, because they had a tennis court there - -

ML: - - there was a handball court there so people were playing handball

NL: I played handball once or twice, but it wasn't my thing [laughs] [crosstalk]

ML: we played a lot of games, we had a lot of friends

NL: And then a lot of people were members of the [Kips Bay], which was a Boys and Girls club on the corner of Randall and White Plains Road, which was around the corner from Jamie Towers. And Kips Bay had everything: karate, football, swimming, dance classes, so a lot of kids would go to Kips Bay

BP: Was Kips Bay private or public?

NL: It was a Boys and Girls club, so it was [crosstalk] probably a dollar membership fee - -

ML: - - and you would get a card and you were able to use the facilities so we all attended, most of the kids I knew attended [crosstalk] something at Kips Bay since it was a local Boys and Girls club,

NL: A lot of people I knew took dance classes

BP: Was there ever any discussion of the role of ethnicity or ethnic identity in terms of your social network? Were you two in some ways unique or similar because you had this return experience to Antigua, an annual experience?

ML: It's funny, I think that - -

BP: Did Damarus go back to D.R. every summer?

NL: She didn't go back to the D.R. every summer. I find that a lot of the people that were in school with us didn't do the same kind of thing. We were very unique in that way. Absolutely. A lot of people didn't go back.

BP: So African American kids didn't go visit South Carolina?

ML: I think they did to a certain extent, but maybe they didn't discuss it as widely. I know we always did say : 'this is what we're doing with our summer'

NL: And after a while people just knew it. They knew that these girls were from Antigua and that's where they're going to go [laughs] they aren't going anywhere else [laughs]

ML: Right, but I don't know that our story was unique maybe they were going back to their origins in a sense.

NL: I think one or two Puerto Rican kids would mention going back to Puerto Rico,

ML: But not as frequently as we went

NL: I don't think people were as regular as we were. That's an expensive trip to be doing all the time and maybe certain families might not have had the financial - -

ML: - - The same kind of means to do it.

NL: And maybe they didn't have the same kind of dedication to going back as much.

BP: How did hip-hop or early hip-hop culture shape social relationships, style, maybe even generational [divides?]?

ML: It was big because I can remember the early "breaking" as they would call it happening right across the street. There used to be young guys who were early in the culture and I remember them putting down their cardboard boxes - -

NL: - - in front of the deli at Castle Hill

ML: - - or in front of Seward Manor which is another complex right across the street that they would break in front of. So you'd hear it coming from the cars or you'd here it coming from people carrying boom boxes. So early on, you knew [crosstalk]

NL: there was something big happening [crosstalk].

ML: And then Video Music Box came on all the time. And Video Music Box was - -

BP: What was Video Music Box?

NL: It was a local video show that was run by this guy Ralph McDaniel. And Ralph McDaniel would play all the videos of all the new hip-hop artists that were coming out and on top of that would also have coverage from local parties and stuff.

BP: what channel was it on?

NL: [crosstalk] channel 31

ML: It was channel 31. [crosstalk] it was a public access station - -

NL: and their introductory song was "Five Minutes of Funk" by Houdini and every time anybody heard that song, if you even play that song now for people who grew up in New York, between '85 and '95, they're going to know right away that's the theme for Video Music Box.

ML: I think that Video Music Box was a way for people to access hip-hop and the culture for those who didn't have cable.

NL: Because cable was something that people didn't really pay for, and generally people who had cable were still watching whit videos. MTV didn't play hip-hop in '85 - -

ML: - - not widely the way that it might be now - -

NL: IF you caught hip-hop on MTV, I heard you had to be up at like 1 in the morning. It there any other time of day.



BP: What time was Video Music Box on?

NL: Video Music Box came on at 3 o'clock, as soon as everybody got home from school, you could watch Video Music Box.

BP: Your parents let you watch this?

NL: Yeah, my mother wasn't even home. My dad wasn't home. We were both just home by ourselves - -

BP: you let your younger sister watch that?

ML: Yeah - -

NL: - - she wanted to watch it!

ML: I would swatch it so she would be watching it.

NL: You would see a lot of these people had videos that were in the neighborhood. KRS One had a video where he was standing in the Soundview and Morrison train station of the six train. We were like "that's the six! That's our people" we felt that. Ultra Magnetic MCs, Kool Keith an them, they had a video at Stevenson track. We saw our building in that video.

ML: There was another artist that had one on top of the local projects on Castle Hill right on top. We were like [crosstalk] "oh that's Castle Projects, that's the [?] building".

Right, you could tell. The [?] building was this building that faced [Olstead] Avenue that everybody would, one of the worst buildings to live in in the Castle Hill Projects

[crosstalk]

BP: The music was a cultural tie - -

NL: - - Yeah and it was like a big deal because like we would try to sit down and try to write out rhymes, figure out what we thought Rakim was saying. [crosstalk] [laughs]

[crosstalk]. We were so into it. I can remember myself, Damarus, this other girl Tameeka, another girl named Erica, we would sit down in class and as soon as we got a free moment, it would be like “Thinkin out a master plan” [laughs]

ML: So it really was big, it was a big thing. [crosstalk] Outside of our own Caribbean music, - -

NL: - - we grew up hearing Soca and Dancehall, or Reggae let’s say in the house, but then when we come outside or if we were ever left to our own devices with the stereo, we’d be playing 98.7 Kiss - -

ML: - - And I think that our parents were pretty open to it because they were big musical people, they liked music, so it was okay for us to watch what was coming up in our generation - -

NL: And they would even get into it too. My mother still loves to this day LL Cool J’s “Around the Way Girl”. She’s still talking about Findey bags and bad attitudes.

ML: It’s true. [crosstalk] And Natasha loves Pete Rock and C.L. Smooth [crosstalk] - -

NL: - - And she loves Pete Rock and C.L. Smooth because of me.

ML: Right, I think there was a transfer in some ways.

BP: How did hip-hop style in terms of dress? [Laughter]

NL: This is funny because the 80’s was still a time when people were getting killed for leather jackets and shanked up for name chains. So we wanted certain things, but we couldn’t have them because my mother insisted that she wasn’t - -

NL: - - and my father insisted - -

ML: - - my father exactly. Because even my older brother at one point when he was still living with u, he came in the house one time with a Triple Fat Goose leather bomber.

Remember Triple Fat Goose was a line of coats. Yeah he wanted a leather bomber and I remember him being adamant he was going to have it. This was a time he had cuts in his eyebrows and he had a high-top fade with the orange dye part. It was looking crazy - -

ML: - - it was a trend, it was a trend - -

NL: - - it was looking crazy, it was looking crazy, the duky chain he had. But he said he wanted this leather bomber. My father said absolutely not. You don't work anywhere and you go out there and you'll get killed for that thing, you know what I mean - -

ML: - - My parents were definitely adamant - -

NL: - - We never had leather jackets until we were something like twenty years old. They were just scared.

ML: They were very scared at that time. People were really getting violent over certain things. [crosstalk] Name chains, I remember Sherlings being a big, the colored Sherlings being a really big trend.

BP: What are Sherlings?

ML: Sherling coats, they have a kind of

NL: Wool, sort of something

ML: Fur inside, the name chains I remember, the - -

NL: - - Eight Ball jackets - -

ML: - - Eight Ball jackets, - -

NL: - - Cross Colors, - -

ML: - - Cross Colors, all kinds of trends came out of the hip-hop movement that we just were never not a part of that.

NL: We didn't wear it, but wanted to. We got our jackets from Alexander's on Fordham Road, [laughs] and [TSS?] in the Bruckner Plaza, that was where we shopped and we had cloth coats our whole entire time in grammar school.

ML: Right, we didn't necessarily dress the trends, but we knew about them, we were aware of them.

NL: And only when The Bronx started to get better like in my later part of high school let's say, I would say my junior and senior year of high school, my mom was fine with letting me have a Nautica jacket or Timberland shoes or something like that.

BP: When you say The Bronx getting better, what was it like before it got better and why would you characterize it as that way?

NL: Well, because I felt like people were poorer. People had to have been poorer. I don't know if it's maybe because you know the democrats got into office in the early 90's, but during the 80's, it just seemed like people were really struggling. The idea that people were getting robbed at gunpoint and knifepoint that you can wear freely around your neck now, nobody's going to bother you when you have jewelry on now. And even now since it's like people, things like snatching purses and stuff like that, you don't hear about that stuff now the way you heard about it in the 80's.

ML: I would agree with that.

NL: Now that's kind of my barometer for how things must have gotten better because petty crime just wasn't the same danger to your person.

BP: To what degree did the underground economy affect a place like Seward Avenue or the Castle Hill section where you lived? Did you see any remnants of it?

NL: You know what, I would say you would know, you knew about it. [crosstalk]  
 Certain people would say “oh such and such is a drug dealer”. But that’s kind of the  
 extent of it. We weren’t so much allowed to always be in the streets that we would know  
 it first hand - -

ML: - - We lived in a more sheltered system.

NL: Yeah, my mother was really insistent. You stay out until a certain time and if  
 you’re outside on the weekends, maybe she’d be outside wit us. Or we’d go to dance  
 class, or do some sort of activity like we’d go to youth group at the church and we’d have  
 like kind of [end of tape one]

BP: Maybe we could talk a little bit about the church now. This is a two part question.  
 Who was in charge of structuring your lives in such a way as to make you aware but not  
 participating in some of the more, I guess, dangerous elements of everyday life in  
 Soundview? And then second, was there a difference between how you both as young  
 women responded to some of these elements of the culture compared to your brother?

ML: Well our brother was only with us a short period, umm - -

BP: When compared to other young men? For the first question, who was in charge?

ML: Who was in charge?, my mom was. My mom was integral and I think she had a  
 very sound upbringing with her parents, and I would say my father the same, but  
 certainly my mother was integral in making sure that we had a sound religious life and - -

NL: - - a day to day structure - -

ML: - - and a day to day structure and a strong academic life because that was just  
 something that she and my father both wanted for us most of all. That we be able to

succeed academically, I think that was a given. There was no question that we were going to become successful people education wise. There was no other option.

NL: And then as for how we responded versus our brother or anybody else who was a guy, I would say hip-hop was something that really grabbed all of us, but I found that the participation in terms of who was rapping, who was breaking, who was bombing, that was guys.

BP: What's bombing?

NL: Graffiti art. And I used to love it. I was kind of one of the people, one of the very few people in New York who I think was sad when they changed over the trains - -

ML: - - Tasha talks about that all the time - -

NL: I just was sad because I thought the trains were so pretty when they were done up with tags and stuff like that. There were certain people who had like, I just remember seeing certain people's tags and they used to do it so nicely.

BP: What's a tag?

NL: When a graffiti artist goes by a certain name and they have a signature way of [crosstalk] spray-painting their name on a train or on the side of a wall on the highway let's say. There was this guy named [Fade] who used to do his tag really well on the Bruckner and I remember seeing his name all the time. His name was everywhere and I used to love that, the way he did his name, I thought he was such a talented person. Who knows who Fade is? Because again, I'm somebody who wouldn't know much about - -

ML: - - particulars - -

NL: Like a guy would. A guy might have more access to a bombing crew or something like that that would then, you know - -

BP: Were most of the young men and women that you socialized with maybe through school or what not through the community, did most of them come from similar households that you two had two parents working?

ML: I would say, if I spoke about the Antiguan people that we socialized with and grew up with, certainly. It was similar and then also the people of St. Andrew's also, we found similar structures there

NL: But in St. John Vianney let's say, there were some people who had single parent households or parents might not have worked - -

ML: - - or being raised by grandparents - -

NL: - - exactly, or being raised by extended family. You saw that a little bit more. We saw it a little more in school than we did in the family and friend environment or our church environment.

BP: When did you start attending St. Andrew's Episcopal Church?

ML: We began attending there I would say if not late '82, 1983

BP: Was there a church around Clark place or Clay Avenue that you attended?

ML: Yes, we attended St. [Simion's] Episcopal Church through a family friend Tammy Turner. That's how we went to that particular church. Before that, my mother attended Trinity Episcopal Church because that was where she was married to my father and where we were baptized, so that was pretty much the extent of our church. [crosstalk]

BP: How come your family made roots in St. Andrew's Episcopal and not in one of maybe in one of the earlier churches in first neighborhood?

ML: It's funny, I guess maybe the frequency with which they went to the church then, I really can't tell you. I know my mom went to Trinity through another friend, that's how

she started out there and they got married there etcetera. I figure they went there not as frequently, I don't get that sense.

NL: My understanding is that mommy started at St. Andrew's because it was just in the neighborhood and it made sense to go some place that was just up the street. St

Andrew's was on the corner of Castle Hill and Lafayette, so it's like a couple of blocks away as oppose to St. Simion's which is way across town, [crosstalk] 45 minutes by bus.

ML: Initially, we were going there as children, I would say I was there as a small child with my mom, but I wouldn't say as frequently as we go to St. Andrew's now. But as I said, Tammy Turner suggested to us "oh, if you don't want to come all the way across to St. Simion's, I know of an Episcopal church right up the block you might find interesting" and from the time that we went there that one Sunday, we've gone there since then.

BP: So who else attended and attends St. Andrew's Episcopal Church?

ML: My mom, my aunt Gwen, the younger aunt, who came to take care of me, she lived with us for a time, and my cousin also.

BP: Your father didn't attend?

NL: No

ML: He did on rare occasions. He wasn't as frequent as we were.

NL: Sunday mornings was his time to relax at home, read the paper, you know, things like that.

BP: Oh, I meant when I , I guess

NL: Oh like who were the people of St. Andrew's?

BP: Well no, no, no, they're both as good, it's the congregation.



ML: Well, I think that when we started out there it was primarily an African American church, I would say. As the years continued, the Caribbean presence became more apparent, where now I would say the church has turned from a primarily African American church to one that is primarily Caribbean, and Caribbean American based. And you still have small pockets of African Americans.

BP: On that note, I'm kind of curious as to in a general opinion maybe even going back to your childhood memories or your young adulthood memories, in some ways, was there anything that distinguished or defined a relationship between African Americans and people of Caribbean descent in The Bronx and kind of the 80's?

NL: Okay, I know as children, we always heard that African Americans were generally "lazier" than Caribbean people - -

BP: Who'd you hear this from?

NL: From our circles of family friends. You would always hear 'Oh you know these black Americans don't take advantage of the opportunities they have as frequently as people who are coming. We come here, we struggle, we're not even citizens so we don't have access to certain things. We have to work hard to get our social security number' and that kind of thing. You would hear that stuff, right. We also heard that they let their children run wild.[laughs] That we heard from our mother. [laughter] That they let their children run wild and you weren't going to be the same way. - -

ML: - - and that wasn't just my mother's opinion. I can say that. From other parents that I knew, they had the same opinion that Caribbean parents had a certain set of guidelines and rules that they kind of followed - -

NL: to like [raise?] [crosstalk] them in a little bit more than African American Children. Those were two things we knew as sort of our growing up. That's what distinguished us.

BP: Did that shape your relationships in any way with African Americans?

NL: I think it was maybe in the back of our minds, but it didn't prevent us from making friends - -

ML: I don't think it prevented us, I think that it made, I think that our having Caribbean backgrounds did make us distinguished because we had certain elements that they were not aware of I would say.

NL: Yeah, we would mention certain things like maybe a food that we cooked and they would be like 'oh we don't cook that' - -

ML: Or even Antigua in general, it wasn't a place that was as widely known to them. I thing that that was , for friends in our family circle, we would talk about going back to Antigua, or even things in Antigua and merely mentioning Antigua, they were like 'what's that?' or 'is that Jamaica?'

NL: 'Montego Bay?' [laughs]

ML: That would be the local that if you mentioned your family was from the Caribbean, that was the local if you were not from Puerto Rico [crosstalk] you're from Jamaica - -

NL: And you're Jamaican.

ML: Right so I think that that made a bit of a disparity I would say.

NL: But I would say that even still just for the purpose of making friends, we made friends with whoever.

ML: It didn't really matter

NL: I mean I just think of my circle, my full circle of friends in grammar school was 2 African American girls, 1 Puerto Rican girl, and one Dominican girl and we were all a clique. We always had [crosstalk] you know.

BP: Are you still friends with them?

NL: Actually, two of them I'm actually really close to still. Damarus has been my best friend since 5<sup>th</sup> grade

And she's Dominican?

NL: She's Dominican. And another girl names Julie who I've known since I was 6 years old. She's probably like my oldest friend.

BP: And what is her family?

NL: Her family is Puerto Rican and we're still in touch too.

BP: Michelle, what were your circles of friends like?

ML: Well as I mentioned before, I went to school with Emery Martin, whose family was from Antigua and we're not as in touch today, but I few got together today, it would be just as if we had never been apart. I think my circle of friends now is more on the Antiguan mainland as I've gotten closer to people there - -

NL: - - but like in St. John Vianney, - -

ML: But in St. John Vianney, we hung out with another Puerto Rican girl, her name was I think Helga, I can't remember. We also had, God, there were a lot of people. I wouldn't say that we were in touch because a lot of those people have moved out of the neighborhoods now, but I'm sure if we all got together it would still, it would be as always. I mean I've run into certain people like Franklin, Santiago, I've run into him. If people come back to the neighborhood and we happen to run into one other - -

NL: we all just catch up. Alexis Delgado, she was in my close circle of friends. She now lives up in New Rochelle. I ran into her the other day and we got back together chit-chatting

NL: People's circles, it's funny how you see some of these people and they are like in high school together too, a lot of us ended up going to the same high school too.

ML: Angie Rodriguez I'm thinking, she was [approved] her family was from Peru. She went to the military - -

NL: - - Yeah there was a guy from Peru in my class too, named [crosstalk] but we used to call him Jell-oey because we didn't really pronounce it right [laughs] and it just became Jell-oey

ML: Her mother still lives in Jamie Towers now and whenever I see her, we get to talking, so it depends on how the circle comes back together, but when it does, it's pretty good.

BP: What are some of your earliest memories of relationships at St. Andrew's or just the friendly memories in general of the role that St. Andrew's played in your family's social and cultural life in Castle Hill?

ML: I think it's pretty primary as I would say. I remember early days in Sunday School being a part of whatever the young people were doing at St. Andrew's.

BP: Like what?

ML: Youth group, we had the youth group and the youth group, I guess, was a way for our young people to get together on Friday nights and talk about lots of different things: things that were happening at church, things that were happening at school, and - -

NL: and the community. And then you would also do fundraising.

ML: You would do fundraisers. As a young person, I remember being a reader, Natasha was an alter server.

NL: And the youth group would take trips

BP: Where would the church go?

NL: Michelle, you went on a couple of trips.

ML: We went on trips to Virginia, - -

NL: D.C.

ML: I know we went to Washington D.C. We went just locally to the movies, we would go down to the [dioces], - -

NL: To the seaport, to the seaport

BP: Who chaperoned these trips?

ML: Our youth group supervisor, her name is Catherine Brant. She's from Belize originally - -

BP: She still does it?

ML: She still does it.

NL: She's been doing it for like 25 years - -

ML: More than 25 years because her daughter was a member of the youth group - -

NL: And her daughter is probably like 35 now

ML: She's been doing it for as long as she's been in the church

BP: Did you both participate in this?

ML: We both participated

NL: We both did, and we were in the youth group at the same time for maybe a year because usually the youth group was for people through your high school life, for years of high school and maybe a bit of college if you still were around.

ML: If you were local I should say.

NL: If you went to school locally then you ended up in the group for another year or two. Generally, anywhere between the ages of thirteen and 17.

BP: How many young people were participating?

ML: I think at its highpoint, it usually was 20 or 25 young people, to as low as maybe 10, 11.

NL: It all depended on the generations that were graduating high school at the time. There was a point where a lot of people had kids the same age. [crosstalk] So the youth group was filled with people and then there was a point where there weren't that many [crosstalk]. But the youth group was always a really good place to socialize and start understanding that you have stake in the church as a young person

BP: How much of an impact did that acculturation have on you both as individuals?

ML: I think it's huge, I still - -

BP: What role does St. Andrew's Church play in your understanding of your community?

ML: Well, for me in particular, I'm still a member and a pretty active member in St. Andrew's. I think like Natasha said, as a young person growing up going to Sunday school, and being a part of the youth group, you knew you had a stake in the future of your church and a stake in your faith. Because it was a church-based organization, you always had that faith-based fence, you knew that at the end of the day, there was that

faith element that tied us together. But it made you know that later on you would be a leader in the church and not only were you a leader as a young person, but you would be a leader later on in life so I think that - -

NL: A lot of people got just a certain type of training there. A lot of people who are in the youth group are now have now served on the vestry, - -

ML: or teach Sunday school - -

NL: Some people have done external stuff [crosstalk] Most people got their public speaking training in the youth group because you usually ended up doing some kind of presentation to the church - -

ML: plays, readings,

BP: Is there any memory that sticks out in particular that you thought was very formative in your participation in the youth group?

NL: I would say, there was always every year, somebody was graduating high school, there was always a youth group member that was selected to give the address because they had Graduation Sunday, where you acknowledge on education. So whenever you graduate in school, you also get a graduation-type ceremony at St. Andrew's to acknowledge your achievements at school.

ML: It goes from the preschool moving up to kindergarten - -

NL: Anybody who graduates from anywhere.

ML: Anything. Anything that is of note in your academic life, it is acknowledged and celebrated, so at the end of the year - -

NL: Because when I graduating for my doctorate, I'm going to go to a Graduation Sunday at St. Andrew's and get some sort of accolades because it's nice and it's like a validating process - -

ML: It's a big deal and a validating process. And I know that the year that I graduated from high school, I was the featured speaker. When Natasha graduated from high school, she was the feature speaker.

BP: In the [?]

ML: In the church, yeah.

NL: That would be kind of a big thing. Somebody from the youth group always gives the address on Graduation Sunday, they did the sermon instead of the minister.

BP: How were you both selected to do this?

ML: I think it was through Mrs. Grant, I think that she and other members of the church would look at people going ahead academically and choose someone who had - -

NL: come up, who would seem like a good candidate - -

ML: A good candidate to represent

NL: Represent their group

ML: Their group, and essentially that was me and that was Natasha.

BP: Would you have to comment on the scripture?

NL: You could, but generally, you didn't have to. You could talk more about the importance of being in St. Andrew's and how it shaped you - -

ML: Outside of St. Andrew's. I know for my speech, I had given a similar speech at Cardinal Spellman, where I had went to high school, and I kind of tailor made it in some ways to what happened at St. Andrew's. I kind of used some of what I said at Spellman



and tailor made it for what happened at St. Andrew's because I think the situation crossed over in some ways. And I know for other speeches that I've heard since then, it's pretty much the same. People talk about St. Andrew's in relation to their life outside of St. Andrew's

NL: And how being in St. Andrew's has made them a much more focused student in some ways, made them a lot more prepared for the world - -

ML: And also made them aware that they have a church family outside of their nuclear family. St. Andrew's certainly operates as a family parish; we're all responsible for one another.

NL: And it's true. In most every graduation address, you'll always hear someone reference the extended church family that they have and how grateful they are for it.

[crosstalk]

ML: And I think that as a result, most of us who are young people who are, I would say, outside of St. Andrew's some how come back or are still participating in it.

BP: What types of tensions characterized relationships between St. Andrews' internal political network or even kind of - -

NL: I would say that there was sometimes some tension between, I think when the church was changing over to a Caribbean church, it was sometimes tension between the African Americans and the Caribbean sets, as to who was going to be the more leading group. But I think the changing character of the neighborhood, more Caribbean people moved into Castle Hill, - -

ML: So that as a result showed in the population of St. Andrew's. I think we also had transitions when we changed leadership, we changed ministers and that created a bit of tension for a period.

NL: Because at one point there was an African American minister, then there became a Caribbean minister. And that was a - -

ML: That was a bit of a transition as well.

NL: I feel like sometimes there is a bit of a gender conflict too.

BP: Right, that was going to be my, okay, could you explain that?

ML: Sure, because St. Andrew's is primarily a female based church,

BP: What do you mean by female based?

NL: A lot of women are the majority of the congregation.

ML: Yeah, you have a greater female population than you do a male population

NL: But the men who are there tend to take leadership roles.

ML: Or at least back at that point of time, you had more male leadership than you did female leadership. I think that that has certainly changed within the time that I've been there. You certainly have a greater female leadership.

BP: What type of leadership roles would St. Andrew's offer to it's congregation?

ML: Well, as an Episcopal Church, you are headed by what is known as a vestry, which is maybe a 12 to 16 person board that would oversee the finances of the church as well as work in conjunction with the minister to see that the life of the church is carried out, and I would say at the time of growing up, it was more of a male centered group and the only people who [crosstalk] - -

NL: One of the only women you might see would be Mrs. Grant, who was the youth group leader that we referenced, and another African American woman by the name of Gwen Carter. There were certain women who were really known to be aggressive women, who would end up on the vestry, but generally, - -

ML: Dorothy [Gottismith?] . Those four women, I remember as a particular leaders in the early days, but I would say - -

NL: Or even Mrs. Coleman too, didn't Mrs. Coleman do it?

ML: Yes, she was integral with the after-school program, so I would say maybe about 4 or 5 women that I can remember in my early days as people who were heavy in leadership capacity. As time has gone on, you still have male leadership to a great extent, but women play a far greater role I would say now than they did then.

BP: To go back to your father, I'm just curious, did he have a particular aversion to organized religion?

ML: No

NL: No, he was very happy that we were so inclined, I think, he - -

BP: I'm sorry, why didn't he see the church as kind of an extension of his political and social network?

ML: I don't know, I wonder if it's because he just thought that was something that [crosstalk]

NL: - - Yeah, exactly, that was mom's demand. Maybe they wanted to keep some sort of, a certain amount of separate lives is good and healthy for a marriage, so maybe that might have been what it was. [crosstalk]

ML: He was baptized as a Christian, and I know that he was confirmed in the Anglican Cathedral down in Antigua, so I know that - -

NL: He would certainly participate - -

ML: But for his own life later on, I really don't know why he wasn't as active as he was with other things.

NL: I just thought about it too, we mentioned the after-school. St. Andrew's is also really good in terms of certain community outreach programs that end up winning young people jobs, which was really important. That's another way that St. Andrew's was really important in terms of guiding people in kind of activities - -

ML: They had an after-school program where they would employ some of the church member young people as counselors and they had a summer day camp for [crosstalk]

BP: Have either of you ever worked at it?

NL: That was my first job. Dennis Coleman, the senator, the New York State Senator that you guys hopefully will interview sometime, his wife was the head of the summer program and she gave me my first job ever. I remember making 50 dollars a week. The summer I was 13, both Damarus and I. Our first jobs were with Mrs. Coleman at the summer day-camp.

BP: Was Damarus' family in the church as well?

NL: No, no, she was Catholic

ML: She attended St. John Vianney's.

NL: But a lot of people ended up getting jobs there. I don't know if you've ever heard of this program called the Summer Youth. It was a New York City Summer Youth Employment Program, that provided jobs for lower income youths between the ages of

13 and 21 I think it was. That was a city program that was funded for years, and St. Andrew's would always take a certain amount of Summer Youth kids from that program and give them jobs at the day-camp. So there was a certain amount of activities, [crosstalk] and I even attended the St. Andrew's after-school program, and that was also really good too. You would get homework help and that was another way to reconnect with some people you knew because a lot of times youth group members were in the groups.

ML: Or you have other local children attending the after-school program. They also have an Alcoholics Anonymous group that was run by one of the members of the church. So you have a lot of programs either being run by the church or housed in the church still.

NL: So they really do serve the Castle Hill community in a big way.

BP: Did your mother exercise a leadership role?

NL: Yes she did. She, at one point, was the president of "The Women of St. Andrew's"

--

ML: "Episcopal Church Women" --

NL: Yeah, which was a branch of the, "Episcopal Church Women" was kind of like a nation-wide organization and almost every church has a branch. And then the women's groups do [?]. My mom was the president for a while and she did things like, they had an international food festival and each island that was represented would have it in the church or each area would have its own little stall. African Americans would have a stall, people from the U.S. Virgin Islands would have a stall, the priest that's now from Liberia, he has a stall. Things like that, and the Antigua stall would be headed by my

mom, spear-headed it and everything went through her. I think the food festival was something that was created under her presidency in the E.C.W.

BP: What's the E.C.W.?

NL: Episcopal Church Women

ML: They would also have mother and daughter luncheons, the E.C.W. That was one of their projects during Women's History Month, in March. They would have a luncheon where they would invite mothers and daughters to come - -

NL: And they'd have a distinguished speaker address - -

ML: Address or host something that would be positive to women and their young daughters.

NL: They do all kinds of like, they're usually responsible for the cooking, the coffee hour that happened after St. Andrew's services end in the mornings.

BP: Was there an equally active male in the women's group?

ML: They were known as the Men's Club there, now they're The Men of St. Andrew's and they pretty much were the male equivalent of the E.C.W. and that's still active today. They have The Brotherhood of St. Andrew's, which is also a national organization of men and they pretty much do what the E.C.W. does on a big level and big scale. What else do we have at S. Andrew's, I'm thinking, there are just so many things - -

NL: [Impact?], which is sort of like a senior citizens group, it used to be a senior citizens group, but now the younger people have joined and it's sort of again another group that's kind of geared at bringing in the senior citizen community, being able to give them a chance to network and do outreach activities. There's also a stewardship committee that's really big on trying to get new membership, and get old members, make sure the

old members feel that they can still invest in St. Andrew's, continue their committee both monetarily and with their talent and resources. So they're so many different ways in which if you're in St. Andrew's, you're doing serious community service and it's just funny that it's like you don't even think about it now, there are certain things that people just do without thinking. [crosstalk] It's okay for just about anybody to get up and address the entire congregation. You do it without thinking because you always have to do stuff like that. [crosstalk] It becomes second nature. Being an altar server, I had no problem standing up in front of the congregation because I always did it every Sunday for a good ten years.

ML: I think that people there, eventually, it just becomes old hat, - -

NL: And now I have no problem addressing a classroom because I just came out of that kind of environment.

[The tape gets smeared]

NL: Like who do you think what happened you would just hear about, you would see someone like Francis. Francis was a crack head that lived across the street in Seward Manor. Seward Manor was at 2025 Seward Avenue, it was another private building. And Francis was this crack head, you used to see her walking anytime of the day or night. She walked everywhere and she had this little shake, and she would just walk. Sometimes you would be on 125<sup>th</sup> street and you would think Francis must have walked from Castle Hill to 125<sup>th</sup> street. She walked everywhere. Those are the things that gave me a clue to the fact that The Bronx was crazy. My last year of school at St. John Vianney, 1991, this was a really sad incident. A little girl named Jessica Guzman who was the year behind me, I remember seeing her one day after school, and that was the last

time anybody saw her. Her body turned up not too far from here on Pelham Parkway. Apparently she had let in a family friend and he was somebody who they didn't know had a prior history of abuse. And so he raped her and left her for dead. There was a candle light vigil for days and they ended up finding her a couple of days later and it was a really scary moment. When you knew that things could happen to you here in The Bronx that weren't always good and being a latchkey kid even, you had to be mindful of things. Our routine was when we got in the house, lock the door and call her. And I knew her number, the time when I was first coming home by myself, her number was 718-330-9797 and I called that number everyday as soon as I came in from St. John Vianney because she just needed to know that we got home safe and then after that, she would say 'you stay in there, you don't let anyone in, not the U.P.S. guy, not the exterminator, not anyone who says they're your friends, because of things like that that happened to Jessica Guzman. So it was important that we had places where we felt safe like St. Andrew's, to balance out the ill that you knew made The Bronx The Bronx.

BP: Did you notice any similar patterns, maybe even different types of benchmarks, or did you notice anything in an older cohort during this time that might have given you [pause] or given you kind of as a benchmark for what to measure yourself against like, 'this is not what I'm not going to do'?

ML: I don't know that I had any "benchmark", but I think I just always had it in my head from my parents that this just wasn't something to do. I think you knew that you wanted something more for yourself, I never thought for myself that that [reading] was something that I was going to do. I never thought there was anything else, I guess. I



knew that the element existed, I knew that things could happen if you entered this element, I just [crosstalk].

BP: What about young courting practices in The Bronx in the 1980's and early 90s, and what were some of the cultural influences, the familiar influences that might have structured your dating lives as young women compared to maybe some other women that you knew?

NL: Well, boys generally couldn't call the house. [laughter]

BP: Could not?

NL: [laughs] NO!

ML: Could not, not at all. We were not old enough to date. That was pretty much - -

BP: Until what age?

NL: You know, it's funny. I wish that an age had been said?, [laughs] But there was no age set.

BP: Did a young guy ever call the house?

NL: Well, with me, yeah, I had ended up, I remember this was after Michelle was going to school. A young guy would call the house, my mother would always ask questions like 'Who is that?' and I really didn't have any kind of, you know, seriously, it was like they were really worried about teen pregnancy. That was a huge thing in The Bronx in the 80's, and our sex talk was 'Don't come home pregnant!'

BP: Or what?

NL: Don't come home pregnant.

BP: Don't come home?

NL: Teen pregnancy was not an option.

ML: [crosstalk] Because it would not work with the plans our parents had set for us so that was not an option.

NL: And you saw it. Someone I knew from St. John Vianney had a baby the summer after we left. I heard she was pregnant, she was 13.

ML: Right, and there was a young woman that also, she had a pregnancy not long after we left in high school. She was in high school and she had a baby in high school, and I know her sister also had a baby if not in eighth grade, then right after graduation, so that was something that my parents were not - -

NL: There were 13 year olds that we knew that were having kids and that wasn't in our - -

ML: Not acceptable. But courting practices, just to give you a sense of what happened, most of the time - -

NL: people were "talking" to each other.

BP: Same in your generation?

ML: yeah, same in my generation.

NL: So and so used to "talk" to so and so. That was like the loose terminology employed for like when you were not really exclusively dating someone and you were kind of interested in someone and you and that person might go to a movie together or - -

ML: hang out - -

NL: Or hang out, or you know - -

BP: So your parents allowed this?

ML: NO, other people's parents did, [laughter] not ours [laughter]

BP: So your parents didn't allow this?

ML: No.

BP: So did you ever circumvent their restrictions?

NL: I did.

ML: I didn't, I was one that played by the rules. I was pretty good.

NL: I did.

BP: You did.

NL: Yeah

BP: Why?

NL: Because I felt like it. [laughter] I'm just too social of a person. You know what I mean? It just ended up happening.

BP: So how did you circumvent?

NL: You know what, a lot of that happened in high school. That was when I was traveling by myself. Going to Spellman, you would end up having a lot of leeway because first of all, you had to take 3 buses to get there. Do you know how much time that took? [laughter] We could get home any time after a certain point. Then it was also the [?] fact that you had a bus pass that looked like a train pass, so you could go about anywhere.

ML: The era of the Metrocard - -

NL: We didn't go to school in that era - -

ML: Right, so that certainly, I definitely traveled. - -

NL: You could go to anywhere. You could start out at Spellman and end up in The Village on 8<sup>th</sup> street looking for shoes. That kind of stuff happened because, well, you have bus pass, will travel.

ML: You would travel to other local schools, travel downtown.

BP: So in high school, you didn't have the same kind of latchkey restrictions of you get home, you have to call?

NL: We had to be home by a certain time.

ML: You had to call yes, but I think you had a little more leeway certainly.

NL: My mom new it took more time to get home from Spellman and we were involved in after school activities, so nobody was going to get home on time the same way it was, ending at 2:40 and we're home by 3:00

BP: So this facilitated Natasha's manipulation of the courtship rules, or of social [?]

ML: Yeah

NL: Yeah

BP: Does your mom know about this?

NL: I'm not sure, we don't really talk about it, I don't think so though.

ML: But she probably does, mom is very intuitive. I think she has some idea.

BP: So why Spellman, why did you go to Spellman and not Cardinal Hayse?

NL: We couldn't go to Cardinal Hayse, it was all boys.

BP: It was all boys. What's the other, there's - -

ML: You had St. Catherine's, you had Preston High School, you had Monsignor [Scamrus], you had - -

BP: What about Bronx Science, or Stuyvesant, and all - -

NL: I know I took the test for Bronx Science

ML: I took the test for - -

NL: Brooklyn Tech

ML: And I got into Brooklyn Tech, I didn't get into Science. I remember Natasha got into Science.

NL: No, here's the thing, I can explain to you. Whith the specialized high school tests, they set the standard for the score you needed to pass higher for students who were coming from private or Catholic schools oppose to people coming from public school because they thought you got a better education. Well I missed Bronx Science and Stuyvesant by two points. I got into Brooklyn Tech, but nobody's going from Castle Hill to Brooklyn Tech.

ML: Well my friend actually did. Angela did end up going to Brooklyn Tech because she needed [?] but I didn't go. It was far.

NL: It was going to Bed-Stuy from the top of the Six train, that's not happening.

ML: But she did it every day. I applauded her for it.

NL: I mean I knew some Bronx kids that did that, But I just wasn't doing it.

BP: So why Spellman?

ML: Well, I always had Spellman in my thoughts since seventh grade because my teacher in 7<sup>th</sup> grade had gone to Spellman, as I said, I think earlier in the tape, and that's where I first got introduced to it and I heard it was one of the best, if not *the* best in The Bronx if you're going to go to a Catholic school.

NL: And I went because Michelle went. Because my mom was just used to dealing with it and it was a school that we knew to have good academic standards [?].

BP: And when did you graduate?

ML: I graduated in '91.

BP: And you in 90 - -

NL: '95

BP: So you weren't there at all [together]?

NL: No, we weren't there at the same time.

ML: I left and then she came.

NL: Yeah and it was like a lot of teachers knew me, there 'oh that's Michelle's little sister' or things like that because our faces are kind of similar, [?] people would identify me [?]. And that was a Spellman tradition to a lot of people. Because sisters and brothers were there [?] older siblings in Spellman.

BP: What kind of role does your Spellman experiences play in your memories of and or your understanding of your roots in The Bronx. Because St. Andrew's Episcopal is very important right? Maybe even Kips Bay or the Castle Hill Tracey Towers, Jamie Towers area is important. What role does Spellman play?

ML: I think that within the Catholic school network of schools, I think many people identified if you were going to high school in The Bronx, and a Catholic school, once you say Spellman, many people identify it and can relate. I don't know if Natasha has any - -

NL: To me, Spellman represented 2 things for me that were new things that I understood about The Bronx that I didn't understand as much being at St. John Vianney or being located primarily at Castle Hill. Number one was an exposure to the West Indian section of the North Bronx.

ML: True that.

NL: There were a whole lot of West Indians up there. We knew about the West Indians living in our neighborhood, but black people there were generally African American, and that was kind of historically the character of the neighborhood. The Area around

Baychester, that's Jamaican country right there. That is like Kingston. And all other pockets of different Islands too, and a lot of West Indian kids I came in touch with were going to Spellman. So that was one of the first things opening me up to a whole nother section of The Bronx where you knew you could go on every corner and find a patty. A good beef patty, not a nasty beef patty that you get in a pizza store, but like a real, good beef patty. Things like that. Go get your hair done. [laughs]

ML: That's true

NL: Gun Hill, Baychester, those areas of the Northeast Bronx, that was where Spellman opened me up to. That was number one. Number two, Spellman opened me up to a whole section of the white people part of The Bronx. Because Spellman had its whole like staunch white population that lived in Morris Park, Throgs Neck, Country Club, Pelham Bay, up in Bainbridge, Pelham Parkway, Woodlawn, the Irish people in Woodlawn, the fresh off the boat Irish plus the Irish Americans, they had a huge section of people in Spellman. Irish and Italian people in The Bronx and The Bronx becoming to me not just a black borough or a Puerto Rican borough, but also a white borough. That's something that I understood only when I went to Spellman.

BP: Really?

NL: Yes

ML: I would agree with that.

NL: So those are the things that Spellman educated me on - -

ML: Yes and it broadened you. [crosstalk] I think our earlier education was more localized whereas with Spellman, you've got cross sections from different parts of The Bronx coming together.

NL: People from all over The Bronx went to Spellman, and parts of Manhattan too.

BP: So your exposure to a larger West Indian, [Anglican] West Indian environment came through food and style. How did your exposure to this larger white population come through?

NL: The other thing that's interesting in Spellman, the white kids and the black kids sort of mixed, but not really, but if you were an honor student, you were always in class with white people, always. There were never as many people in honors class because Spellman had a regular track and an honors track.

BP: And were you both in the - -

NL: And we were both in the honors track and we were

[end of tape 2, side A]

BP: So you're saying that only a few - -

ML: Well, let me put it this way: before you enter Spellman, you took a test, a placement test. And if you placed high, they have what was known as the honors track and they would have a certain curriculum that they would create that would funnel these kids that were [?] higher academics.

BP: Was the general track segregated by race?

ML: No. No. No.

NL: I find that even as I was going to Spellman, there was a change or whatever taking place where there were a lot less white kids coming - -

ML: Absolutely.

NL: over the course of successive years. [crosstalk] a little browner over the last decade, decade and a half. But the white kids that went to Spellman, a lot of them ended up in the



honors program, and so I knew a lot of white people at Spellman because I was in the honors track.

ML: I will also say that my affiliation with the band-twirlers flag core, white people were also involved with that.

NL: Yeah white people were involved with the band. Because we were both, Michelle was a twirler, baton twirler and I was the captain of the flag core. And so those were all sections of the band that you would represent. You would represent Spellman at all of these big parades. We both marched in the St. Patrick's Day Parade, the Columbus Day Parade, there's a Martin Luther King Parade. And you would be out there and - -

ML: it would be a gathering place for all of the Catholic school kids so you would see - -

NL: the different bands. But then you also understand a little bit more how Spellman was really connected to Irish and Italian communities in New York City because Spellman always, if there were two parades that they had to be in, it was Columbus Day and St. Patrick's Day. And Columbus Day, you had routines to that old Italian song [imitates the musical notes to an old Italian song], you know that old song? You had a routine to that. You had a routine to old Irish [diddies] as well, so you would understand a little bit more about the whole white character of Spellman, of old Spellman, let's say.

ML: Right, that's what carried over.

NL: And you would march in the Morris Park Columbus Day Parade as well. We wouldn't just march in the downtown parade, you would also be, they had local parades that they would march in to, and in The Bronx.

BP: How did students of color interact with these traditions during your - -

NL: They didn't, if they weren't in the band [laughs].

ML: Right, if they weren't in the band they didn't, or sports life, the really didn't.

NL: See, and the thing too you know in sports sometimes - -

ML: may have made it a little bit more open I think, - -

NL: to black people being represented at Spellman.

BP: Did Spellman have a football team?

ML: Spellman had a football team, baseball, volleyball, [crosstalk]

BP: How big was the school you were in, how many students in your classes?

NL: About maybe three to four hundred people per class, so there would be at any given time, on average, a thousand to twelve hundred people. Spellman is a very big school.

BP: [For a] Catholic school.

NL: For a Catholic school especially, it's a really big school. But Spellman was usually represented by its white faces and the journal that would come out and be sent to all the alumni and when you would look at academic competitions, it's usually the white people who are in them. The band was pretty much white. But sports! [laughs] Usually the Spellman representatives in most Sporting competitions were black people.

ML: Black people were by and large the majority of people on the basketball team, the track team, the football team sometimes had a mix.

BP: Is there a reunion?

ML: There is a reunion, I have not yet attended one, but there is one.

NL: [crosstalk] happened during the year that daddy passed away, so we were in Antigua when her reunion. Mine is coming up this fall.

BP: Do you plan on attending?

NL: I am going to go. I'd love to see what those people are up to. [laughs] God only knows.

BP: This is my last question, you still live in The Bronx.

ML: Yes I do

BP: Michelle lives in The Bronx and Natasha lives in Harlem, do you see The Bronx as a place that you'll stay, Michelle?

ML: Well, I would say I think I will always have a connection to The Bronx no matter where I go. I still have aspirations to get back to Antigua for a time and live there, so I ultimately see myself living there for a period. Somehow I think that The Bronx, New York somehow will always be a part of my connection and I think that that's [relatively] true for anybody that I've known of Caribbean descent who goes back home. There's always some tie that keeps them connected to New York. So I think it will always be a part.

BP: How important to you is it that you possible return to The Bronx, is that something that's important?

NL: Yes, I actually have thought about it more, especially now that I've been thinking about kind of the scope of this project, and just possibilities for even being able to afford owning property in New York, The Bronx is a viable option for me. So as a younger person coming out, probably single on my own with my first job, I doubt I'd be able to buy anything in Manhattan, so, Harlem, the real estate market there is way beyond my reach, so I think The Bronx would be a great place. Actually I think I got such an education living in The Bronx, being raised in The Bronx, a certain education that you couldn't get. Like I tell people this all the time, people would say 'oh you lived in The

Bronx, did you dodge shots everyday?’ In The Bronx, there were bad things and yes you did hear gunfire in some places, but it wasn’t really the kind of place where I felt so [egregiously] unsafe. I think it was good for me that I got so exposed to so many different types of people and so many backgrounds that nothing phases me now.

ML: The Bronx is wide open and all of my experience [crosstalk] - -

NL: Pretty much, I could point to so many things where I’m like ‘I saw that in high school’. People were flabbergasted my first year at Yale. Like people were flabbergasted my first year at Yale, these are some people coming from let’s say an essentially black or Latino upbringing, when they saw out gay people, they were like ‘oh my God’. And I’m like first of all I’m coming from New York and second of all, Spellman, in my years I went there, there were so many out gay people in Spellman, which was ironic for a Catholic high school. We had a gay class president and she brought her girlfriend to the prom. Things like that. I find that The Bronx had such a good cross section of different types of people that I never felt like I hadn’t been exposed.

BP: What did you mean when you said The Bronx was wide open?

ML: I just always felt it had a scope that was just intersecting, connecting, it just had a vision, somehow. I always felt that about The Bronx, and as we were talking about Spellman and that area being a pocket of Caribbean exposure, I always felt like stepping there, I would be safe. There are just a lot of places within The Bronx that I feel I’m safe because I’m from there, I’m from this piece of history. That’s what The Bronx represents for me, it’s home in many ways. [crosstalk] Like Natasha said, I think that there’s something about people who are raised in The Bronx, you just have seen so much that

you're not surprised by a lot of things that other people are surprised by, I guess that's kind of where I feel I am with The Bronx.

[tape skips]

NL: I think I might have been about eight, [to Michelle] you might have been about thirteen or something. It was just this one time, one Saturday afternoon maybe - -

ML: NO, we were younger than that, we were younger than that

NL: We were younger? So maybe we were like, I was maybe like five or six or something [crosstalk]. Whatever it was, daddy decided because he kept saying 'these Puerto Ricans have such a ball. They're always talking about Orchard Beach. Orchard Beach is like the place to be so why don't we go?' So we piled up in the car one day he's like 'we're going to go'. Daddy had these moments where, usually mommy took care of us, but there were these moments where daddy would just be like 'I'm taking the girls' and we would just go.

BP: So just you three went?

NL: Us three because we're in the car we're like 'yeah yeah, Orchard Beach, it's going to happen'. And now, I'm going to preface everything by saying we are Antiguan and we are used to white sand beaches and blue water where you can see your feet when you go in the beach. And we arrived at Orchard Beach [laughs] think again. Now if I said I was five or six, it would have made this at around 1983, 1984 [laughs]. [crosstalk]

Orchard Beach was crazy. We saw water that was - -

ML: [refuge?] coming out the water - -

NL: Yeah, we were expecting body parts to wash up on the shore. Orchard Beach was nasty. And it was like, again, the sand was like the color of this brown table here, - -

ML: It was definitely murky. I know coming out of it, we were like 'this is not' - -

NL: What did we spend about ten minutes - -

ML: We didn't spend that long there. And I've never been back

NL: And that was kind of again, those were the educational moments, when you understood that you're not in Kansas anymore. This is very distinct from your experience in Antigua. This is very distinct even - -

BP: So you've never been back to Orchard Beach?

NL: No, never been back

BP: [ it's too salty?] You might start saying some bad stuff about Coney Island.

ML: No really, I was small. I had to be a year or maybe two and my dad did take me to Coney Island and I have a button that we took together, a photograph button that we took together at Coney Island. I think that - -

NL: It's the greatest picture.

ML: It is the greatest picture and I had - -

NL: My father has on this straw hat and Michelle has this little headpiece thing - -

ML: To me, I can't remember that memory, but that picture-button is something that I really treasure because I think it probably is the one if not the only time that I've been to Coney Island, so - -

BP: Well I've never been to Orchard Beach. [laughter]

ML: I don't think you're missing much though.

NL: I heard they redid it though - -

ML: Yes, they've redone it and I hear it's very good.

NL: But you know, I think that first experience really soured it. I remember seeing a needle on the beachfront. That was the one thing that stuck out to me from that Orchard Beach experience and I was like ‘no, let’s [?] a new Orchard Beach’ [laughs]

BP: You’re a beach essentialist.

NL: I’m sorry

ML: Rye Playland.

NL: Yeah, we went to Rye Playland - -

ML: We loved Rye Playland, dad loved that.

NL: We did fun stuff around the area, Orchard Beach was just not it.

ML: We went to parks, we loved going to the park - -

NL: Yeah, we went to Pelham Bay Park, that’s where I learned to ride my bike. There’s some good things, but [laughter]

[end of interview]