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African & African American Studies Department. Callender, Mike--Robert Caines Jr. Robert Caines,
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Fordham University

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Interviewees: Mike Callender

Robert Caines Jr. (aka. DJ Flawless)

Robert Caines (aka. DJ. Rockin' Rob)

Melvin Howell

Keith Johnson

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: July 21, 2007

Mark Naison (MN): Today is July 21, 2007, we're at Fordham University with 5 people who are going to be talking about the rise of Hip Hop in the Millbrook, Patterson and Mitchell houses section of the Bronx. I'm going to allow them to introduce themselves.

Mike Callender (MC): Alright. I'm Mike Callender. I grew up in Patterson Houses.

[Laughter]

MN: You're involvement with music and your exposure to it.

MC: Oh, my involvement with music. Back in the days I used to work in the Wiz which was on 153rd and 3rd avenue. All the DJ's used to come to the Wiz looking for different beats. I knew all the different beats because I had access to all the records. I used to also spin. I used to go to Rob's house with my Mom and everybody and Rob had a set and I used to just be sitting there in the room, "Yo Rob, can I spin, can I spin?" and I would watch Rob practice and play. So, back in the days, and I used to watch Mel, better known as Mr. Showtime who used to spin in the club called the Big Ben's back in the day.

MN: Where was Big Bens located?

MC: On 141st –

Melvin Howell (MH): 141st street and Alexander Avenue.

MN: This in the Bronx, a club called Big Ben's?

MH: That's right; it was a whole re—renovated building that they turned into a club. Underground.

[Laughter]

MH: Yes, we had a ball up there. And it's like the first floor was, like, the DJ setup, you know, you had the dance floor, the next floor was lounges all the way up 5 stories.

MN: Do you have any fliers from those events? Did you keep of that stuff?

[Crosstalk]

MN: We'll talk about that later.

[Laughter]

Keith Johnson (KJ): I do got pictures man, I got pictures from Disco fever and [Inaudible]

MN: Ok, just for the help of our listeners, because a lot of people are not only going to listen to this interview, they're going to probably watch the video and read about it. Any time you mention a store, a club or an outdoor jam, give us the address. So, you know, where was Disco Fever?

MH: Off of Jerome Avenue

[Crosstalk]

MH: It was like 16 – like 168 and Jerome and the cross street was Featherbed lane.

MC: Yeah, that's right, that's right, Featherbed lane.

Robert Caines Jr. (RCJ): Hi, how you doing. My name is DJ Flawless and my real name is Robert Caines Jr. I'm Rockin' Rob's Son.

MN: Oh wow!

RCJ: Yes, and I'm from Monthaven projects, across the street from Patterson projects. And, I been DJ'ing since, what, 3 years old? I touched it when I was like 3 and stuff like that and right now I'm in DJ competitions, I work for a DJ school called Scratch DJ Academy. I just recently did an event for Tools of War out on Queens Bridge. Right now I'm just trying to bro, have my skills and everything on point and follow this man and everything.

MN: I got to get everybody's date of birth.

RCJ: January 23rd, 1983. I'm 24 years old.

MC: January 21st, 1963.

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

Robert Caines Sr. (RCS): Date of birth -- well my name is DJ Rockin Rob. I used to play for the crew called the Original Mean Machine Crew. They were located in the Monthaven section of the Bronx, 143rd Street, 143rd Street. The group was founded by my son's uncle, whose name is T-bird but we call him Tony Tone. And how we got the name Mean Machine was because of the movie The Longest Yard with Burt Reynolds that's how the name – the group – the name Mean Machine came about. That's how the name came about. And our official colors are red and black, our music colors are red and black. About myself, I've been spin – I'm from the Mo – I'm from Patterson Projects originally. Lived there for 5 years, then our family grew so we moved to Monthaven, Monthaven Projects. I've been spinning for, officially, 31 years. I started in 1976. And how I started was [Laughs], I started from watching, I got to give – who was my inspiration, the gentleman by the name of Raoul. He was a Spanish DJ; he used to play in 154 Park.

MN: Ok, where is 154 Park.

?a: It's in Mitchell.

RCS: Mitchell Projects, 138th, --

[Crosstalk]

RCS: 138th, 137th Street. And there was this park. And he was the first DJ that I ever seen, come across putting mixing like magic.

MN: His name was Raoul?

[Crosstalk]

RCS: DJ Raoul. Some people called him Rookie, but his name was DJ Raoul from Mitchell Projects and that's how I got inspired on spinning.

MN: Did he work with 2 turntables?

RCS: Yes he did. He worked with two Pioneer, belt-drive turntables with a GLI Mixer. You had to see it to believe it. And his sound system, he used to use Electroboyz Eliminators model 2A, model 2B.

MC: Echo-Chamber balances.

RCS: Echo-Chamber's. I mean, but he – what was really amazing and magical about him is the way he can manipulate two turntables. He wasn't one for just repeating sound back and forth the way Flash did. What he did, his concept was to get from point A to point B without even letting you know he switched. So there was little box called a mixer that – who knew that now this is the most popular unit out besides the two turntables. And he was playing this one mix that I – Raoul, I stole it sorry [Laughter] I borrowed it. He used to take the song called "Pursuit to the Pimp-mobile" which is by Isaac Hayes.

MN: Pursuit –

RCS: Pursuit to the Pimp-Mobile

MN: Pursuit to the Pimp-mobile!

RCS: And it was by Isaac Hayes, it's on the Truck Turner album.

MN: The Truck Turner.

RCS: And he used to mix Booker T and the MG's "Melting Pot". Right behind it in such a way that when he made the transformation you never even knew he transformed the song. And from that point on I wanted to do that.

MN: I want to ask you something Rob, first your date of birth.

RCS: Oh, ok. I was born, December 27th, 1960.

MN: Ok. And what's your actual – your parents name, other than your DJ name?

RCS: Oh, my real name is Robert, last name Caines like Senior. This is my son DJ Flawless here.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Did you have any electronics training in school that prepared you for, you know, this pretty complex DJ operation.

RCS: No. I started DJ'ing from playing drums. I'm originally a drummer .

[Crosstalk]

RCS: I started playing drums when I was 9 years old. They wouldn't buy me a drum set so I had to beat on pots, pans, cereal boxes and finally maybe at 13 I got my legitimate drum set. Which, it was – to get my drum set, it wasn't the one I wanted but, you know, my father figured, you know, hey, start off with this. And then I later converted the drum set and added all kind of hardware and pieces to it. But originally I'm a drummer and then what happened is that it was hard to get – I didn't have a drum set at the time but they were banned and it was hard to get on somebody else's drum set and they were the main drummers, like, “no. Can you please? He's not getting on the drum set.” So, it's like, I always had the job where I had to carry the most equipment. So then I said there's got to be something where I can be out in the forefront, do what I like to do and it doesn't take that much to carry. So that's where the DJ'ing came from that.

KJ: Hi, my name is Keith Johnson, aka Star of the Show DJ Moe.

MN: Say that slower.

[Crosstalk]

KJ: Oh slower. My name is Keith Johnson aka DJ Moe, Star of the Show or Star of the Show, DJ Moe.

MN: DJ Moe, Star of the Show!

KJ: I started DJ'ing a little bit earlier. My uncle used to play block parties for Clermont. Clermont Houses.

MN: Clermont Houses.

KJ: Clermont Houses on 169th street. And he used to have old turntables and I used to watch him, how he played and so one day, he said, “I'm going up here. Go play the music, just keep it going.” So I started learning how to keep the music going. I used to play James Brown, “I Can't Stand It” and that was the thing going on at that time so I played that, I played a couple other records. And then -- and I lived in Monthaven Projects, 140 -- 357 East 143rd Street. So me, Rob, we got together, we had this band called Starfire Express. So I was the saxophone player.

MN: So you also had musical training.

KJ: Yes we had musical training. So that's why came. Rob always had the good ear and – so, at the same time we always had a record collection. Between his father, my father and his brother, they always had music. Anywhere we went we wanted to hear this music. So one day they came with the cassette players. I decided to start making cassettes because I started – I used to listen to the top 100, the top 40 and I got inspired by Frankie Crocker and started listening to Frankie Crocker on the airwaves talking junk and stuff like that. So one day – Rob used to have his 8-track so we decided, in front of 143rd street before Clark Park, we all used to get together and –

MN: Say where that is.

KJ: Clark Park.

MN: But near Clark Junior High School on 143rd and where?

KJ: and 3rd avenue.

MC: Actually 144th.

KJ: 144th and 3rd avenue.

MH: 143rd between Willis and 3rd.

KJ: We was in that front building right there, the project building. So we sit right there in front of the marble. I used to bring – come down and make my little, my little tape or whatever like that. Rob would listen to it and say, “Oh, I got you, I got you.” Next thing you know, an hour later Rob would come down – this all happened during the summertime. And this – matter of fact part happened during the summer of the Seventies.

MN: What – do you remember what year the first time the two of you did this?

RCS: '76.

MN: '76.

KJ: Hold up, hold up wait. Was it a pause button tape?

RCS: Oh no, mines was live.

[Crosstalk]

KJ: And matter of fact, Rob taught me a lot of this stuff too. Because one of the things was we started different stereos. So you would take the jack out from the headphone, pull it out [Laughter], pull it out so this way you was making your cut because we didn't know nothing about mixing. So you would listen to the beat of the records and you would just count bars, because Rob was dumb. He said, “Listen. Just count and listen to the beat.” So I used to pull it out and then bam! Hit the record. So that's how we began. So we started doing it off of “Just Begun,” James Brown records and stuff like that and that's how we started to DJ. And then officially in 1978, right Rob? 1978. We was at Rob's mother's house, Trudy. Her mother – we used to always get together and we used to go – This is 140th, 340 Alexander Avenue, 15b. We used to all get together and we used to have a new year's party. So I came with my records ain't realizing I don't have a lot of hard record collection. T-Bird, we talking about Tony, Tony Tone, he had a lot of records so they said why don't ya'll come up because I had went there at Thanksgiving. So Rob was saying like, “where you going at?” I said, “They asked me to go play up here at Trudy's house, so I'm going up there.” And so Rob said, “Come on. I'm going up.” So the next thing you know Rob came up there and we started playing. And the next thing you know the legend of Rockin' Rob came because I wasn't good on the rhythm all the time. So Rob would come over there and say, “Yo, let's do it like this.” And then Rob would put it on and the next thing you know everybody was excited. So we all got mad like, “Oh, so this is the way it's going to be now!”

[Laughter]

KJ: We started separating it in groups. So we had the Master of all Turntables versus –

RCS: The Funk Train.

KJ: I was the Funk Train, and he was the Master of Turntables.

RCS: There was a total of like 12 DJ's that's how we started. There was about 12 of us. One being Flawless's [Robert Caines Junior] which is my son's mother.

MN: A woman DJ in this! What was her name as a DJ?

RCS: DJ Trudy True.

MN: DJ Trudy True. We got to get here in here. We got to represent for women too.

RCS: And for her mother, I have to thank her, because it was her mother who gave me the name Rockin' Rob.

MN: Now in listening to you it sounds like you had parents who had some musical training and interest.

RCS: That's correct.

MN: And, you know, the Hip-Hop generation didn't come out of nowhere. You were exposed to music through your parents. Did any of your parents play musical instruments?

RCS: Mine did. My dad semi-drums, but he was into Jazz.

MN: He was into Jazz.

RCS: He was into Jazz.

KJ: My father he just listened to Jazz records.

MN: So they were Jazz fans.

RCS: My mother was a pianist. My mother was a concert pianist.

MN: A concert pianist. Classical?

RCS: I couldn't even – I think she played a little of everything.

MN: A little of everything. Did either of you play music in school? Were you in, like, the band in your junior high?

RCS: I was.

MN: At which junior high?

RCS: IS 183.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Which street was IS 183 on?

RCS: 100 and – oh my God – 141st and Morris Avenue. And it was Wayne, Ron, Myself and Fleet. Fleet was the bass player.

MN: Was this James Fleet?

RCS: That's right.

[Crosstalk]

MN: We interviewed him. His father was a very famous musician.

[Crosstalk]

KJ: He played with Francis Fleet which is the baby brother.

MC: Right the baby brother. Right, Francis Fleet because him and I were in the same band. We were in a group called High Heights.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Now.

MH: Ok, my name is Melvin Howell; I am from the Bronx, south Bronx. Mitchell Projects. I was born 10/28/58. I first started getting connected with music – We came from St. Albans, Queens to the Bronx in '65 and my father, he's from the south, way past. He's from the south, from Georgia and I got connected with that music through my uncles, you know, the James Brown era and stuff like that. My father used to live about three or four blocks from James Brown in St. Albans. So I got that soul thing from my father thing. You know when your uncles came over, "Mel, what are you doing, go over there and play the music." You know, that type of thing and it kind of, like, stuck, you know what I mean, like, I wasn't playing for no money, you know what I'm saying. And if I did entertain then I probably would have had to go to bed. But it was all good and later on as we grew up, you know, in the neighborhood, like I said, Patterson was our next door neighbors, Monthaven and Milbrook. And most of the guys from Patterson – we went to school together and stuff like that so a lot of people used to come from Patterson to Mitchell because that was where the big Center was at.

MN: The biggest of the Centers was in Mitchell.

[Crosstalk]

MH: And that's when gangs. The Black Spades was out and they used to have the big Spade parties in there, you know. I used to be in the park, 154 Park also. Raul used to come from my building, the DJ he's talking about. He was also a Spanish DJ. He was just off the chain. He was good and a real person too. And he really started that out in that park, you know, before they even had MC's. He was there --

MN: Now what sort of music was he putting on?

MH: At that time he was playing a lot of hustle music, what you call it – Double Exposure.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: What was that one song he used to start with? Was that the Mickey Mouse club?

KJ: He used to end it. He used to end it with the Mickey Mouse club.

MH: And we also – we – I used to play with a DJ that came from Patterson by the name of Allan Mitch. We called him Al G.

RCS: Al G!

MH: Me and Al used to do a lot of underground clubs together like Big Ben's on 141st street. They used to have –

MN: When you say underground does that mean it didn't have a license?

MH: No. When I say underground it was like nobody was out in the mainstream. We was just doing little things in places –

MN: It was a neighborhood place.

MH: Right. You know and sometimes you wasn't supposed to be there but, you know what I'm saying. We would go up in there and play the music and stuff like that and after a while we came around a crowd that was like really into, you know, partying and stuff like that. So the word got around and we was pretty good DJ's and stuff like that so all the owners from different clubs would like, you know, ask about us and we would just go over there – a lot of people didn't even know it was happening because it was a certain set going on at that time. We called it underground. We wasn't even supposed to be in some of these clubs, you know, and stuff like that. But we took it from the clubs to the parks, you know what I mean, did a lot of block parties and different things like that. From that I went to announcing, doing a lot of announcing, hosting shows for Vinny Jackson, I worked with James Brown's camp, for Bobby Bird that worked with James Brown. A few people, Von Harper, I used to bring him on at the 41 Club on 58th street and Madison. I came from the old school. Reflections, Justine, Hotel Diplomat, all these old clubs.

MN: No. You've got a great voice. That great deep voice.

RCS: You got to hear about the marathon. You got to bring that up man.

MH: We did the New York Marathon, Me, Rob, Rob's son here. Chuck D, Chuck City, a couple of us was out there. And it was good for us all to get back together, you know what I mean, because I got to see Rob, Rob got to see me but we never had worked together. So it was very nice that they – and I, I'm doing a lot of broadcasting work. I'm doing stuff for Bronxmedia.tv. I'm hosting a show so if you hear the name Mr. Showtime that's me.

MN: I've seen it around.

MH: And behind that is DJ Mello Mello. I always put Mr. Showtime in front of DJ Mello Mello because I always went through that controversy thing about, "are you Mello Mello, or which one are you?"

[Laughter]

MH: I'm not that one, you know what I mean? He's from the 5 MC's, I do my own thing, I'm the host and that's what I do.

MN: Now you mentioned your family came from Georgia. Did any of your families come from the Caribbean?

MC: Yes.

MN: So tell us a little bit about your family and how they came to the US and how they came to the Bronx.

MC: Ok, well 1.

MN: Is that – food?

[End of Session]

[Crosstalk]

MN: Mike, so talk a little bit about your family and how they came to the United States.

MC: 1. my father was born in Barbados. He came to America – I don't know the exact dates or whatever but he came from Barbados here. He met my mom in Harlem. My mother was born in Harlem but her mother was born in Panama and her father was born in Barbados. Then when I looked and found the transcripts we found out that my Grandmother was also born in Barbados. So my Grandfather and Grandmother were both born in Barbados but my Grandfather left Barbados and came straight to America as opposed to my Grandmother leaving Barbados and went straight to Panama, then she came here. And then when I went back to Barbados a couple years ago I found out that my Grandmother and Grandfather were married first in Barbados with that old tradition of – lets' say you have a daughter, I have a son we want to make sure they grow up together and get married because we want to make sure that the family and the genes and – so we – I found all this out after researching. So then my parents met in Harlem, they – my mother lived in Harlem and then from Harlem they moved into the Bronx. When they moved into the Bronx there was a small Caribbean, I would say, like, network. But also there was a strong bond between a lot of the parents, mainly through Mitchell Gym. That's where all of the parents, you know, the Caribbean, the South, they all linked.

MN: So the people from the Caribbean, the South, you know, linked together.

[Crosstalk]

MC: And they, they formed strong bonds where – that's how me and Rob became, you know, good friends because –

RCS: because of our parents.

MC: Right. Because of our parents.

MH: Southern people and island people, yes. And that explains the rum punch with you.

[Laughter, Crosstalk]

MC: But you know, all in all, my parents when I research it all the way back, I found out that my great-great-grandfather was, he was, oh gosh, blond hair and blue eyes and from Barbados. I was like,

“wow, that was interesting.” And then I also found out my grandfather owned a large amount of land in Barbados but he wasn’t an industrial thinking man. And some of the land currently right now, speaking with some of my uncles to try and find out how much to pay on the taxes to –

MN: Right, to get it back. Ok, Rob, you r family, how did they come here?

RCS: Well, my parents, my mother and my father, they were born in New York. They Harlemites. I believe they were born and raised in Harlem, but their parents were – my father’s parents were from St. Kitts, my mother’s parents was from Antigua and Nevis. But my parents directly, they were born in New York. They weren’t born from the Island, they came from the grandparents.

MN: What about you Keith?

MC: Excuse me, I wanted to just say, but they instilled a lot of the Caribbean culture growing up.

MN: You grew up with the food.

MC: Oh yes, yes.

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

KJ: My mother was born in Charleston, South Carolina and my father; he was born in Miami, Florida and his family is from Barbados so that’s where the connection –

MN: So you have a mixed marriage.

KJ: Yes, because they – we haven’t done the research and I’m really just connected up with my folks, the Johnsons down there and trying to get the history. Because they like always saying man listen, “I have some Caribbean in me.” I said my great-aunt she was the one who really told me that my aunt and uncle – he’s the other one who really told me, but my father doesn’t really talk about it.

MN: And your family were all southern?

MH: Yes, southern. My mother’s from Augusta, Georgia. My father’s from Siloam, Georgia. And they moved from Georgia to St. Albans, Queens and from St. Albans, Queens in 1965, to the South Bronx.

MN: Now did you have church backgrounds? You know, so talk a little bit about that.

MC: Oh man, I remember as a kid, the pastor would come to the house.

MN: What church was your family church?

MC: Oh man, I can’t tell you the name of the – well, there was one, the Episcopal Church that was in Harlem on 114th street, I think. I used to – my mom used to send me and my brother to my aunt’s house and my aunt would take us to the church then after that she would send us back home. But I remember some Sundays the pastor would come to the house and do prayers and everything and like, we – it was kind of different, you know, it was different churches because first it was the – put it this way, whichever aunt was able to take us to church, that was the church you went to.

[Laughter, Crosstalk]

MH: [Inaudible] had to go to church. You need church in your life.

MN: It was the church as an institution, as a community and a – now it sounds like you all grew up in a very strong family atmosphere. Because, you know, one of the questions is, you know, the 70's was a tough time in the Bronx and in the City, you know, how did you guys keep out of all the things that were, you know, taking people out?

MH: My moms, putting a foot in you. Don't go here; don't go there, you will see for yourself, I told you. And everything she said came true. Believe me when I tell you. It wasn't easy though. It wasn't easy because every time you go outside, it was something going on, you know, but it wasn't the things that's happening today. It wasn't that deep, you know, the most the Police might bring you upstairs for sitting on the chain, or playing with the elevator, you know something like that.

MC: Hanging out by the river throwing rocks at the circle line.

MH: When I was growing up what kept me out of trouble in Mitchell Projects was, I used to go to the store for the housing cops.

[Laughter]

MH: I used to go to the store for the housing cops, to the little diners and stuff like that for them. They used to give me money, you know, to keep me out of trouble. And also, when trouble was around and I was there, they would snatch me right up and take me straight up to my mom.

MN: So they looked out for you.

MH: Oh yes, they looked out. I looked out for them too because they was doing a lot of things.

[Laughter]

MH: Sneaking around with the ladies and stuff. But Mel knows about that, you know.

KJ: Hello, may I help you?

[Laughter]

KJ: On that too, like, how I met Rob was that we was playing across the street in Clark Park. So we was playing out there and I saw Rob over there and then next thing you know, Me, Rob and Rudy, the 3 of us got together and then the families – the mothers got together.

MN: How – So how old were you when you guys met?

KJ: I was 8.

MN: Oh, you started playing – when you said playing, not playing music, playing. You know, like the swings, throwing a ball around.

RCS: I met him when I was – I met him Keith when I was 6 so [inaudible] so you talking about over 40 years.

KJ: I moved over here with – in 1968 when the Monthaven Projects first opened up. The other part that was influential, I knew – well, Rob knew, and I guess a lot of us here know a lot of the folks that was in the gangs. They would keep us out of the gangs. They would look out for us they said this wasn't for you.

MN: Now explain that to the people who are going to be listening, because, a. I don't think too many people know very much about gangs and that contradicts what, like gangs do today where, you know, they're out to like grab anybody who they can.

MH: Well what happened was in those days, like, we was all family anyway. It was somebody in that gang that probably went to school with my sister, that know my mother. So certain people they were like, "look, you can't hang out with us." Because they didn't even want you in they business like that. But if you are the type of person that went for bad and like you had a little heart, look, come on you can go with us. But they saved a lot of us.

MN: That's interesting, so they – unless you were a stone street person, they didn't want you. They said you can do something else.

KJ: Exactly, and it didn't flip until the 80's when the drugs actually came in.

MN: When the crack came in.

KJ: When the crack – that's when it flipped and it really started messing up the families because it was about the profit it wasn't about the front no more.

MN: So you think that heroin -- that crack was worse than heroin in the end.

[Multiple outraged reactions]

MN: Ok, we'll get to that as a matter of course.

MH: Was it?

MC: But I want to tell you something about how the gangs looked out for the neighborhood and the younger ones. I remember there was one summer where, at Mitchells, I think, the Black Spades and the Bachelors were going at it. The fight started from under the bridge.

MH: Under that tunnel.

KJ: Under the tunnel and came into the park. All the kids and everybody was playing before they – I mean, they fighting. They stopped. And literally somebody stopped and just said everybody get out of here. Everybody left. I mean everybody left the park. Everybody just left. And people – I remember looking through the window and you could see them fighting, but it was like – this is how we're going to finalize it and that was it. But also a lot of the older guys in the gangs, like Campy, he used to take me and my cousin boxing. He used to say, yo, ya'll can do this, instead of doing this. And my cousin, Earl, I used to always have to jump in for him, but, he took us boxing and you know that was different because --

-

MH: Because Campy was into boxing.

MN: Where was the boxing gym in the area?

KJ: Morrisania. Morrisania

MH: and Saint Mary's.

MN: Say where – exact location.

KJ: St. Mary's –

MH: St. Mary's about 140 –

MN: At the St. Mary's Center?

[Crosstalk]

RCS: That was one and then the other one was the other one in Morrisania which would have been, oh damn. Up on – up by East Tremont, something like that.

MN: So that's what they call the Fort Apache or the YM – the Boys cl – the Boys and Girls club?

RCS: Right, that one.

MN: Yes, that -- that's still there, they still have boxing there. So those were the two spots.

MH: Yes, and they used to bring, like, a portable ring sometimes to Mitchell Gym when they had those boxing tournaments. They used to bring wrestlers in there and stuff like that.

MN: How big was Mitchell Gym?

MH: Oh, big. Big!

MN: How many people could you fit there if you had a party there?

MH: About 2,000?

[Crosstalk]

MN: You could fit 1,000 people?

MH: Yes.

RCS: Yes, easily, easily.

MH: When they used to have parties in that gym, it was cool to know who had a part or who was the DJ. Because at that time the DJ's, you followed the DJ's party. You know what I mean?

RCS: That was all Flash, that was Flash's home, Mitchell gym.

MN: So Flash used to spin it there? Now would he charge admission?

RCS: Yes.

MN: Ok, so he'd make money from that. They'd let him, you know charge a quarter or 50 cents or whatever?

[Crosstalk]

RCS: It was a rental if I'm not mistaken.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Oh, he rented it?

MH: They used to have a promoter that would rent the gym and hire Flash to come in and play. All Flash would do is play, his name is on the flyer. The place was packed.

RCS: All the time.

MH: So the promoter used to go to the little local spots, long as its big enough, like the Boys club or the Renizon (?) where its lots of space because it wasn't nothing about the tables or sitting down at the tables, they was just coming in with no tables and partying.

RCS: But hold it, hold it, when you talking about Mitchell Gym, you talking about back in the days when they had the jams like Flash and everybody and B-boys. We had the B-boys.

MH: Break dancing.

RCS: Break dancing, right there.

MN: Now when did – when did you guys start becoming aware of B-boying and break dancing?

RCS: '76 for me. That's when the whole ex – that's when I got into DJ'ing, because that whole existence started for me when I got involved in it. When I saw Raoul, the first time I ever saw him was 1976.

MN: And did he have B-boys with him out there or not really?

MH: They didn't even call it B-boys then. They used to say like we going up into the park, we going to break and we going to challenge each other. You know what I mean?

RCS: Me, Joe Hall, all of us from Mitchell, we called ourselves the B-boys because we wanted to be, like, because there weren't B-boys, you're right. We were the B-boys. We had our shirt and it said B-boys, because you had the Path crew and then you had –

MH: You had little Rudy them from Patterson.

[Laughter, Crosstalk]

RCS: These are different DJ's, but also dance groups.

MH: It's so many DJ's that have not even been mentioned that deserve a whole lot of credit. And B-boys that really set the tone.

RCS: So when we put on our shirts, B-boys we was telling everybody, look, we break dance. But not only did we break dance we had our little makeshift systems and we would have out little parties in

Mitchell's on Willis Avenue and 138th street, the building on the corner, Miss Johnson used to let us have our parties in the summer in the little community room.

MH: Miss Johnson is the president of Mitchell organization.

RCS: And I don't want to say, you know, a lot of times when people talk about Hip Hop pioneers, they fail to give recognition to the Seniors, to the adults that used to say, "you know what, we going to open up the centers so you can do this so ya'll can get off the street now."

MN: This is a very important theme, because some of you know there's going to be this whole press conference at 1520 Sedgwick where – with Herc.

RCS: Right, I heard about that. And when I got the email I was kind of like disappointed because it's like, I'm going back and remembering how Hip Hop, scratching, it was all over, but for us – I mean, for me, it seemed like it started right there at 154 park.

MH: That was the Mecca right there.

RCS: That was it. The big park, the big park, and then --

MH: It was happening on the south side and it was happening uptown at DiValli. Those was the big spots, 18 Park.

MN: Where's 18 Park? Is –

MH: 18 Park is where College Avenue –

KJ: College Avenue and 140 –

RCS: 146.

KJ: Right, because St. Peters St. Peters was here and Lincoln Hospital was [inaudible]

MH: It was a DJ set. They used to have Flowers out there, P DJ Jones out there. It was DJ's that had so much equipment it was crazy.

RCS: And one of the greatest, influential DJ's, rest in peace, Mario.

MN: Now we heard about Disco King Mario from Cool Clyde and they came in here for an interview and he said he was amazing.

RCS: Him and Lightning Lance.

MN: And Lighting Lance, they were both in her.

RCS: Shout out to Lighting Lance and Cool Clyde. Disco King Mario was one of the most influential DJ's because he had – besides P DJ Jones, he had one of the most incredible sound systems. Him too also used to use, I think he used a set of Technics turntables. I think they were – I don't know the models per se.

MH: They were, R -23's

RCS: But they might have been 1800's or whatever. Because I used to use SL -23's which I still own and my Gemini mixer.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: And Mario used to use a Club Min- 22 mixer. It was about this big, about the size of a square and he used to play with it standing up and he also used to use Electro Voice Eliminators which were one of the most powerful speakers at that time. And – but he was one of my influences as far as sound.

MH: And Echo Chambers was a big thing at that time. Everybody's echoing.

RCS: AJ had – AJ Scratch had one and I'm going to say it for the record had one of the best Echo Chambers on this planet. And sorry AJ I'm going to put your Echo out there.

[Laughter]

RCS: It was a rolling Space Echo, Model 308.

MN: Now is he from your area?

RCS: AJ was from Moore Houses and he used to –

MN: Right, ok. They're right by St. Mary's Park.

RCS: And his area was St. Mary's and Moore Houses. So he used to actually operate on both areas. Like when he felt like throwing a jam at St. Mary's and he used to pack it. There was always like thousands of people and then also –

MN: And this is all like '76, '77, '70 –

RCS: This was all like '78, '79, '80 and which was, you know, a prime time years for Hip Hop because it was in its true essence, it was uncut, it was pure, there was no imitators anybody. There wasn't a whole lot of us but people gradually started getting into it, wanted to do it, be a part of it. So either where, where I came in, I had the talent, but I didn't have a system. So you had people that had a system, they didn't have talent.

[Laughter]

RCS: They combined this no talent with talent, the one with the system with no system and then that's why you have a lot of DJ's.

MN: Now I want to go back to the parents and the senior citizens and the older community leaders, because I don't – if you read the books about Hip Hop, nobody mentions them. And I think that these are the folks who made sure you were able to get the spaces. Can you name some key individuals who played a role in your lives? Because we want to put – you know, give credit to individuals so people can remember them.

MH: Hugh Evans.

RCS: Thank You.

MN: Hugh Evans.

MH: He used to be the director of the Mitchell Gym. And right now he is a professional referee for –

RCS: Retired.

MH: -- He's retired, for the NBA.

MN: Are you still in touch with him?

MH: Well every now and then he might come through the neighborhood.

MN: Ok, Hugh Evans from – I can find him.

MH: Ok, Hugh Evans yes.

MN: And he was somebody who saw this as –

MH: Well he's the one that put together – where you had the young youths coming out of school and you had your center cards, you know, I would go in from like, maybe 4 to 6 then you had the Seniors that go in from like – you know, different times and stuff like that, he kept us off the street and stuff like that.

MN: Did people see what you guys were doing as constructive for young people to be doing? In other words, they said, we may not understand the music but this is something that is keeping them out of trouble?

MH: It definitely kept us out of trouble.

RCS: In my case, like I said, my son's grandmother, who they called A.K.A. Disco Lady. Like I said, she gave me the name Rockin' Rob. She actually supported the fact that all of us used to unite in her house and play music. Because what parents realized is that when we were up there we were safe. Because we weren't running the streets, we weren't getting involved in anything. All we wanted to do is play music.

RCJ: And they have footage on that.

RCS: And we have footage and everything like that.

RCJ: And it's unbelievable. It's unbelievable to see the footage of back then – when I used to watch when I was a little kid I used to just sit there and was like, “damn, I really wish I was there.”

MN: Somebody – I'm just going to throw this out that somebody should put together a whole like exhibition at the Mitchell Center of all this stuff. A major, major exhibition on community Hip Hop and we'll work with you on this. But this – it's like what we saw – what you saw with Beat Man, you know, when I saw what he had, you know, and that's just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the, you know. So there are ways of publicizing this, that – yeah, but that – So Mr. Evans, is there anybody else you can think of.

RCS: Ms. Penny, Mr. Simpson, oh man, who else?

MH: Mr. Mack.

Mr. Mack, Mr. Blake, obviously Blake, Blake was there. Who else?

MH: Boom Boom Coleman.

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

RCS: That was my councilor.

MN: Ok, tell me, give me little descriptions of some of these folks.

RCS: Ok, I was in summer camp at Mitchell Gym, I forgot what year it was. Boom Boom was a senior councilor. Boom Boom was, he was a big buy, he was about 6 – 6’ 2” or something like that.

MH: A very cool guy. Real cool.

RCS: He was, like so cool.

MH: He was a Bill Cosby. He was a real Bill Cosby.

RCS: He’s the type of guy where it was like, you seen Boom Boom it’s like I want to grow up to be like –

MH: Boom Boom. He was a clean cut guy. Because we didn’t have too many idols.

RCS: Right we didn’t. And Boom Boom died early.

MH: Yes, he died Early. And Boom Boom was one of those people that had me in his Bidy League and that was the only Bidy League I ever was in.

MN: This was Basketball?

MH: Yes, and we had this big argument because I came out of the locker room with black socks on man.

[Laughter]

MH: I had black socks on!

KJ: Be Chicago Bull things.

MH: And the deep thing about it is the first time he put me in man, I panicked right and I must have thrown the ball man from half-court. He said, “Hey man don’t go in, you’re sitting down.” In a way that man, he said, “I’m still not going to excuse you for the black socks.”

RCS: Also I want to say Dave from the Gauchos. He started the Gauchos.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Now where was the Gauchos Gym located?

RCS: They didn’t have one.

MN: They started out –

RCS: They started out in Mitchell Gym.

MN: The Gauchos started in Mitchell Gym?

RCS: In Mitchell Gym.

MN: And what years was that, in the 70's?

RCS: That was in the early – early 70's yes. The 70's yes.

MN: So you had strong adult figures in your lives.

MH: Like big brothers in the neighborhood.

RCS: But also I want to say the Gauchos when they started, they used to bring Tiny Archibald by to teach us how to dribble.

MH: Yes, he stayed in the Gym. He stayed in Mitchell Gym all the time.

RCS: But Mel said it, you know, we all had older brothers, you know, God Bless my brother [inaudible]

MH: Yes, I mean it wasn't no Michael Jordan and that stuff, you know, looking up to Michael it wasn't – your momma was your hero.

KJ: My brother was my hero because he taught me – he drilled me to death, that's why I was the ball player that I was until this day and I couldn't wait to beat him in ball. I love you bro, but thank you for allowing me [Inaudible]

[Laughter]

MN: This is also Basketball?

KJ: Yes, and I came from – my family was a track and field and ball family.

MN: Ok, now what high school did you go to?

KJ: I went to Rice High School.

MN: Oh, and you play there?

KJ: Oh no I didn't. I played intramural ball.

MH: I went to Haaren.

MN: And you went to Haaren in Midtown?

MH: Yes.

RCJ: I went to Westinghouse High School.

MN: I know – in Brooklyn, I know that – Jay Z went there.

MC: I went to numerous High Schools.

[Laughter, Crosstalk]

MN: You and Allan Jones. Allan Jones went to 3 different – he started at Taft to Roosevelt to Morris to Rikers.

[Crosstalk]

MC: I started out in Chelsea because I wanted to follow Jo Jo and I wanted to get into electronics so I went to Chelsea. I turned down Brooklyn, what was that, Westinghouse

MN: Westinghouse.

MC: I turned down Westinghouse, because the first day I went there, they had a riot! And I was like yo, what the hell am I going to do, so I broke out and I was like, you know what I told y dad, I said, “Mom, I can’t go there, they already having riots and everything and I don’t know anybody.”

[Laughter}

MC: So then I ended up at Chelsea and from Chelsea I got kicked out at Chelsea. And then from Chelsea –

MN: How did you – How did that happen with Caribbean parent how did you survive.

MC: I –

[Laughter, Crosstalk]

RCS: I went to Evander and Evander was going good but I had too many friends there and, you know, and I got into a fight one morning and I was pissed and then the lady, the lunch lady, I remember, I remember this clearly, she said something to me. I used to joke with her every morning. This one particular morning I was already pissed because I had a fight and she said something and I thought she said your momma. And back then, you say your momma to somebody that’s it. Me, I was just quick so I just said, Wham!

MN: Oh! The lunch lady?

MC: I hit the lunch lady.

MN: Oh God!

[Crosstalk]

MN: Right, you’re the first person I’ve ever met who admitted they hit a lunch lady.

MC: I have to admit it because it’s on record.

MH: And it wasn’t about the food either [Laughs]

RCJ: I was just friends with somebody.

[End Tape 1, Side 1]

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

RCS: What is it, 1 Broadway something? I had to go to the superintendents building, I had to sit in front of a table with two microphones, my mom was sitting there and they said, “Ok, can you tell us everything that happened?” I was like, what the hell is going on?

MH: You went to a hearing board huh?

KJ: I don’t know how he did it. You ever saw his dad?

MH: Oh, yes.

KJ: His dad is swollen B.

[Crosstalk]

MH: I used to sit in there watching him lift weights with my dad as a little kid.

KJ: He made, he had – this is the only body builder I know who had his own personalized bench that he built himself.

MH: He’s the first black body builder I ever seen.

[Crosstalk]

MC: Matter of fact my dad started what’s his name, what’s this brothers name? Herman.

MH: Oh yes!

[Crosstalk]

MH: And you know what’s so funny man, I used to slap Herman in the head, stop playing with the elevators, pap. I would do it then. I won’t do it now.

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

MH: He grew up on the 13th floor of my building.

MC: So then after Evander, I ended up in Morris. And then Morris was just like, it was like hanging out in the park because you knew everybody was in Morris. The first day of school it was like, “Yo Mike, yo Mike!” I was like, “Oh man, this it for me.” But I made it through; I mean I managed to go through my rough necks.

KJ: The trials and tribs.

MN: Now one of the things I wanted to ask you about, like B-boying, when you started doing this kind of dancing, how influential was martial arts in that, or was that – that wasn’t a factor.

[Crosstalk]

MH: You have never seen guys that wasn’t even working out dancing the way they was dancing. These cats wasn’t working out they were – they didn’t work out they was on the floor dancing already.

KJ: And that was the workout!

MH: Now it's a certain way you do it where you know you don't break your arm and all this. But these cats was breaking they arms to get the dance down, you hear what I'm saying?

MN: So when you started, what was in your mind that – about dancing that way? Where did – was this stuff you got from watching other kids, was it stuff you made up, was it –

MH: They made it up.

RCS: Well some of the stuff we had to make it up right on the fly. Because if you was – let's say, I remember me and Earl, we used to dance together against somebody else in Mitchell Gym. We had this move that was like, that was it, that was the killer move. We'd be break dancing right, so you do your break dancing spin, then you do the robot or something like that and then the next guy does his thing and then we would start doing something and Earl would break dance, look at the guy and fall back and I would catch him.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: And I would catch him, throw him back up and then he'd do the split. And we got that from like James Brown.

MH: And Little Rudy and them had a little move where they would be battling against one another, it's like, "Oh that's all you got?" He would put a cup out, put something in the cup, turn it up, [inaudible]

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

RCS: For the record, I got to say this. The four greatest break dancers of all time that did not get the recognition that's due them. One, Little Rudy, he was from Patterson Projects.

MH: This guy was good.

RCS: He was from like 140th, 139th street in Patterson. Then you had Clark Kent and they used to battle all the time.

MN: And now where – what was he from?

MH: Uptown.

[Crosstalk]

MH: He used to play with Cope LaRoc and them.

[Crosstalk]

MN: That's Herc's group right?

MH: Yes, that's uptown.

RCS: Clark Kent and Little Rudy used to have the battle of all battles and Raoul used to play the music.

MH: Raoul used to be the one playing the music.

[Crosstalk]

MN: And they do it in Mitchell? Or –

[Crosstalk]

RCS: Mitchell was the main area. That's where the biggest was.

[Crosstalk]

MN: So that – Mitchell indoors and outdoors was the Mecca?

KJ: We did it in and we did it out.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: The other two that I got to give recognition to that never gets the recognition, one, Cocomo.

[Crosstalk]

MH: Cocomo was – everywhere Cocomo went he had a little crowd.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: Last but not least his other counterpart was Tiny Tom which is, my son again, that's his uncle.

RCJ: I've heard stories, a lot of stories.

RCS: Baddest B-Boy on this planet. Can dance – all you had to do was play James Brown and – Tiny was from Monthaven Projects and Cocomo was from Mitchell Projects. For Tiny all you had to do was play James Brown, "Give it up, Turn it Loose." That was it.

[Crosstalk]

MN: I got – I have all of those songs in my office so.

RCS: Huh?

MN: I have all those songs in my office.

[Crosstalk]

MN: I have, "its Only Just Begun," "Apache," "Give it Up, Turn it Loose" etcetera.

RCS: There was a key and a "Mexican" which was a hustle song and a B-Boy anthem.

MN: "The Mexican?"

RCS: "The Mexican" by Babe Ruth.

KJ: The "Shaft in Africa," "Shaft in Africa" was another B-boy song.

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

MN: Ok, "Shaft in Africa" was Isaac Hayes?

RCS: Clark Kent's song and Little Rudy's song was "Listen to Me" by Baby Hue.

MN: "Listen to Me" by Baby Huey.

[Crosstalk, Singing of "Listen to Me"]

RCS: And "It Just Begun."

MN: and Jimmy Castor.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: Let me tell you, Little Rudy.

MC: Oh he was, he was phenomenal.

MH: Rudy was off the beat track man.

KJ: But you know what? Rudy used to incorporate gymnastics into his stuff.

[Agreement]

KJ: He would do this and do a back flip!

MH: The way he used to move his body used to just be crazy man.

KJ: Oh man! The ultimate!

RCS: He, Little Rudy was the one that came out with Moon Walking before Michael Jackson did it. He had a dance called "Walking on Air."

MH: And everybody used to flip out.

RCS: That's right, and what it was – where Michael Jackson is like, he uses his – the ball of his foot to push back and glide back. He used to actually make his foot go one on top of the other and really move.

MH: Like he was riding a bike pedal.

RCS: It was the most incredible thing that you ever seen in your life and he actually invented it. And now, you know, later on in the Michael Jackson era, Moon Walking, Michael didn't have – there was no such thing until –

MH: Well everybody else -- Mike did the Moon Walk backwards, the same as the Camel Walk is going frontwards.

MC: Right, exactly.

[Crosstalk]

MH: I got that from James Brown.

MC: But hold up, hold up, wait. You got to give props to Patterson see, Little Rudy, from Patterson.

[Crosstalk]

MH: But you know that's why we said there's so many people. There's so many people, on the dance tip, on the mike tip, so many people that haven't even been mentioned out yet.

RCS: And the ultimate for me is – the thing with Hip-hop is that – what I'm going to say, and people might hold me accountable for what I'm going to say but they just have to. There's no one person can write the book on it. Because, everybody – there's too many different avenues –

MN: There's too many different stories.

RCS: -- and there's areas while, I'll give you a perfect example. While Flash was playing here, Cool Herc was playing here, Bambaataa's playing here, DL was playing here, so who was capturing that whole event while everything is going on at one time. And then there's other events – you got guys that played – I ain't going to mention no names, but you got guys who played with these guys that didn't even get the recognition that's due them and they was there. And you hear about even battles that happened --

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

RCS: You might even hear about a battle that might have happened but then it's like – it's under the carpet.

[Crosstalk]

KJ: There was a battle, I'll name one DJ, Flash. And the other DJ I won't name at this point in time, but they had a battle, Flash did not win that battle. And if I'm correct that was the only battle Flash ever lost. Am I right Rob?

RCS: It's been told. Alright, It's been told.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: But you know what, there's different avenues and people might take things differently.

MN: Have you talked to Troy Smith?

RCS: Yes.

MN: Ok, so Troy, so Troy has –

RCS: But I have an interview with Troy. Troy and I we supposed to sit down and [inaudible]

MN: Because yeah, we – because we interviewed him and he gave us a couple of his tapes with Cold Crush and Tre.

RCS: I gave him the tapes recently. Of my stuff.

MN: Of your stuff.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Because he didn't have – nobody had – oh Wow! So he – yes, good, good.

RCS: So he has two copies – I actually gave him like two copies of stuff with my group from back in the days and matter of fact even the record guy played an important factor. We had – there was a guy, God bless his soul, his name was Lenny and he lived in the Soundview section of Bronx. And this was a guy who was a distributor of beats and we used to go to him to get the rare beats. And he used to sell them out of his house. He had – it’s like going to a development and he has closets and closets full of records and whatever you wanted he went into the closet and pulled it out and gave you two copies and stuff of it. And another record person that I got to give much respect to is Elroy. Elroy used to work at Downstairs Records down on 42nd street, underneath – in the subway, there was a record store and Elroy – I got stuff from him in particular.

MH: Lot of underground down there.

MC: That was serious underground music there.

MN: Now I want to do a pause now.

[End of Session]

MN: What I wanted to ask was about was Emceeing. When is the first time that people started Emceeing over beats and when did that start catching on? Because the DJ, it’s clear what you’re talking about, DJing is being the center of everything.

RCS: Right, he was the forefront, he was the orchestrator and he was, he was the leader, he was the everything and then the Emceeing came about. When I took witness to it, it was around ’78. That’s when I put – that’s when we put our group together. And it was basically just the DJing taking a simple part of a record and just extending it, going back and forth and you had either one guy or a group of guys saying a rhyme or verse or –

MH: Over the beat.

RCS: Over the beat and just – or doing [inaudible] chants.

MN: Now did any of you do that? Or the rest of you guys were all –

[Crosstalk]

MN: Mike?

MH: I did it early, yes, as like a crowd pleaser.

RCS: Exactly.

MN: Can you give me an example of what you –

[Crosstalk]

MH: We wasn’t even rhyming, you know, let’s see, “We right here at Big Bens, we making the place happen,” you know, “wave your hands in the air.” You know, we just make you reply to certain things we would do. You know no –

MN: “All the ladies in the house say oh!”

[Crosstalk]

MC: But hold it, there was a rapper, no a Emcee who came out and he first, he came out on tapes, on regular cassette tapes. I want to say, not Raheem, Cowboy. It was Cowboy, God bless his soul. Cowboy, he was with the Furious Five. His rhymes were like, were sick at one point. I mean, he was the one that came up, “From the depths of hell to the –

MH: Yeah stuff like that yeah.

MC: -- such and such. I’m going to take this spinning, hey! Flash is going to hit it.” And oh man, his rhymes were –

MH: Actually whatever came up came out.

[Crosstalk]

MH: Just keeping the crowd going.

KJ: People going to hate me but the greatest Emcee of all time is Mele Mel. I’m sorry, I – I know people are going to disagree, they might, but I’m telling you when you hear Mele Mel talk, when you heard him rhyme rather, or speak it was like you was in church. I mean, it’s like having a preacher and you felt it.

MN: Well, “The Message” is still the only Hip hop song in the Norton Anthology of African American Literature.

MH: That’s the crossover right there.

MN: That song, I mean I still – when I go into a school and I put “The Message,” on and I go, “Broken glass everywhere/ people pissing on the stairs/ you know they just don’t care.” I can’t – I mean it just – it’s still, the kids still know that.

MC: They can relate to it.

MN: That’s – that has lasted.

RCS: But the good thing about Mel, what was good about him is that you had people, you had Emcees, because you got Emcees and you have Rappers, there is a difference. An Emcee is a Mike Control artist. He controls the crowd and does rhymes – now the thing was, was that Mele Mel was the type of guy that when you heard him, music or without music he could make you dance. Not too many people could do that. He had such a rhythm that he used to tell Flash turn off the music and he used to start snapping his fingers.

MN: Really?

RCS: And he would start just, just doing these verses and you would just start clapping your hands and bouncing and dancing and there’s no music. And then all he would do is give Flash a cue and he would say, “1 for the trouble, 2 for the bass, come on Flash let’s rock this place!” And the song would come on, bop! And everybody was like, “Aaah!”

[Laughter]

MH: He was running the band. He was running the band.

RCS: He was – Mel was – Mele Mel was one of the most powerfulest Emcee's that ever existed. Like I said.

MC: In St. Mary's park. I remember one night there was in St. Mary's park. And oh my – it was Flash, AJ and somebody else just like, just – at that time it was like, like you could say like with the jazz era where the musicians just say, "Hey, we all going over here." And everybody just happened to be there.

RCS: A big jam session.

MH: It was fun.

MC: And it was just fun. So let's say it starts out with Flash, next thing you know AJ shows up because St. Mary's park is right there next to his area, so AJ would show up and the next thing you know you got, what's his name, Herc or somebody might show up. And then before you knew it you had just 4 or 5 DJ's just playing.

MH: And everybody working together because it'd be like, "Yo, I got two bass bottoms man, you still got that amp?" "Yo, you still got them two turntables man?" "Yo, you sure you going to bring the turntables out man, because if you don't want to bring them ain't no sense to bring the bass bottoms." And they used to work together like that.

MC: And the thing that was beautiful about it, all you had different styles. You know all you --like every single group had they own standpoint, they own standpoint, they own group.

MH: That's what makes the South Bronx unique because everybody's different, but everybody can come together with it.

MC: See this is how Keith and I got together. I was the Hip Hop section of Mean Machine, Keith was the Disco section of Mean Machine so he was doing a more sophisticated, the grown and sexy type thing where you had to wear shirts, you know, a shirt with a collar. I was doing golf hats and jeans and sneakers.

[Laughter]

MC: So what happened was – what we did, what we ended up putting together – I had this record collection, you know with, on top of hooking up with other members of the group. He had his Disco section and we said, "You know what, wait a minute. Why am I going to buy what I buy and buy what you buy and we can just put it together and make one unit. So now whatever he had a single copy of I had the double to it. Whereas I didn't have to go out all the time and buy two copies of the same record. So we put the record in –

MH: [Inaudible]

[Laughter]

MC: Yes, so when he brought his crate, I brought my crate it's like ok, I need "Dance to the Drummers Beat." He'd go – He'll go in his crate, pull it, I'd go in my crate, pull it and I was able to play it. But then the only time where that would've become a problem is that if the group dispersed, if they broke up

because now I'm taking my half of "Dance to the Drummers," and I'm taking my one speaker and I'm taking my turntable and you can take your own turntable.

[Laughter]

MH: That's right, because even if you have an argument or something like that you'd say, "Let him go. Let him take is joint bro." "But if he take his joint we ain't got nobody else."

[Laughter]

KJ: But that's true. That's how we got our set together too. Because Rob got his tower, Bullfrogs, columns --

RCS: I bought Bullfrogs. I got that from Raoul because Raoul used to play with Shore Columns.

KJ: -- 18-inch Bullfrog Columns.

RCS: Raoul used to play with Shore Columns. And I was like, yo that's cool, they small, they kick, you can, you know, put them in a corner, you put them in a car you good. I said I'll play those speakers. Then later on when heard Mario and even groups like Brothers Bass, I give Brothers Bass love. They had these big humongous Bass speakers --

MH: Out of nowhere.

RCS: -- and I'm like, what's that sound coming out of there? I said, "We got to get a pair of those."

[Laughter]

RCS: They changed the whole system up. But then later on as you started hearing guys like Mario, P DJ Jones, they gave you more education as far as what a system should sound like. So they had like the deepest sound system. And then even also Breakout and Baron who was -- who were Funky 4 Plus 1 More --

MH: Shao Rocket

RCS: -- their system was outrageous.

MN: Now what part of the Bronx were they from?

RCS: They -- Breakout and Baron if I'm not mistaken they was from like, they was from Soundview if I'm not mistaken. If I'm not mistaken.

MH: Yes, but they used to hang out up there by --

RCS: By Edenmore

MH: -- Edenmore, you know, Burnside all the time.

RCS: And then Superman. I got to give love to Superman. Superman, he was a Sound -- he's another one that's deep in the Sound. But you have guys like that --

MC: What about Sweet C.

RCS: That was, there was a battle of all battles, I – and I don't know if it's ever been told but it's going to be told today. Pete DJ Jones and at the time Love Bug Starsky, they were together. Anyway there was this Lady DJ named Sweet C. She came in the park, 18 Park with a brand new system, not even – it was wrapped, out the box brand new! And what happened was, it wasn't a battle at first, it was, it was just a matter of, Pete was supposed to play this time and you know DJ's didn't have that courtesy, like its like, "5 minutes you should be off," and then if you got the crowd rocking you ain't ready to get off. So she's pulling herself, brand – I mean turntables, I mean loading the cartridges, man, like plugging the wires, brand new sound system, speakers all over the place. Anyway, she finally get her system hooked up and she's ready to get on her set. She says, ok, she tells courtesy Pete, you know I'm ready to get on. Pete, [Laughs] Pete playing, they still going, they just jamming. Sweet C get's on the Mic and makes an announcement, "Pete, your time is up." Pete still kept playing! She said, "Pete, last announcement, your time is up!" Pete used to use like Bose 901's –

[Crosstalk]

MN: Now people have to understand that Pete DJ Jones is 6 feet 9 inches tall.

RCS: So now you have this, this young lady, she's about maybe 5, 5'8" maybe about 5'7", 5'8", she got a whole male crew, she's the female DJ. She gets her stuff. Next thing you know you hear this wind.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: Overpowers his set.

KJ: And Pete had the baddest set we knew in the Bronx, the baddest.

RCS: It was phenomenal what happened. Because she came on it was so loud. You know you supposed to break your system in, it came on loud! So then the next thing you know the music stopped. So I guess he asked for like an extension, like listen, I got one more record to play whatever or whatever.

RCJ: [Inaudible]

RCS: Before the whole party was over to make a long story short, she blew out one half of her system and then before she knew she blew out the whole system and that's how loud she played. That was history in time and a lot of people don't know that. Sweet C.

MH: That's what we should have, a DJ convention in Mitchell.

MN: As part of the event, you could do it like, you know, a couple of days. You know, you do an exhibition, but you also have a show, you know, an opening, you know, a lot of events.

MH: A demonstration, a rap.

MN: Yes, the main thing is get the Mitchell Center people on board with this.

MH: We can get this.

MC: The only difference right now with Mitchell Gym, it's now been converted so it's no longer its wide open space like it used to be. Because the part and –

[Crosstalk]

MH: The part where we used to party at was that big part where you play the ball at.

MC: I just remembered something. Do you ever remember when, I think it was Santana, or a Latin group used to play the little park. The little park or Mitchell Gym.

[Crosstalk]

MC: They used to have live bands and I think one year Santana played there.

MH: And a lot of Spanish groups played there, a lot of groups played there.

RCS: GQ before they was GQ played in Monthaven Center.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: They were called, they were called Raheem, my man Raheem the guitar player, they were called the Rhythm Makers.

MN: One of them is Arthur Crier's son. The great Doo-Wop guy was – one of his sons was in GQ.

[Crosstalk]

KJ: Yes, he plays for our Christmas parties and all that.

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

MC: It's like a little reunion man.

MH: Last time I seen this guy's walking past the hallways school like this man.

MN: You're Kidding? First time in 40 years! That's unbelievable!

KJ: I have to talk about Jeff, there's a lot of people I haven't seen back in the day. But I know Henry, I see Henry all of the time, once and a while, he does the busses.

[Crosstalk]

MC: He lived in my building!

[Crosstalk]

MC: Let me rephrase that, I lived in their building because they were older than me. I had to put it that way.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Now when did Beatboxing start entering this or was that part of your –

[Crosstalk]

MN: We need a demonstration.

RCS: There's different types of Beatboxing.

MC: Break it down Rob, Break it down.

RCS: There is the mechanical Beatboxing which was an instrument; it was either a drum machine which Flash used. Which I have that machine to this day at my house. We ain't going to talk about that part of it.

[Laughter]

RCS: But anyway, there's a machine that Flash introduced to Hip-Hop and he was the first one to actually come up with it as far as I know about. And it was a Vox percussion King. It was the company Univox, but they used to call it Vox. And it's a black unit and it was manually played. It was no, like a church organ where they have an automatic drum machine. This wasn't an automatic machine. It was a manual machine and you had to play it by hand like you were playing a piano. And Flash was the first one to incorporate that and then from there came the Funk box and everything else. Me personally, I never wanted to be compared, or it said that I took material from someone. So it was one of my DJ partners whose name was Tiny Tine at the time and they dragged me, they was like, "Yo, you got to come to this guy, you got to hear this guy named Flash." So I was like, you know what, alright. So we go there and sure enough there was this segment of the show where he got this box out there and Mele Mel is talking again, and then Flash got on this box and started playing it. And I'm like, oh, I could do that, I'm a drummer.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: Now I'm not even taking it from a DJ's perspective I'm taking it as a drummer's perspective. I said, "I got to get that box, that's a bad box". And he's just playing these keys and all these sounds are coming out, Bass, snares and tom-toms and I'm like, oh man. So maybe a couple of months later, I go to Gun Hill Road, music store called, I forgot, across the street from Evander Charles High School, and I happen to just go in there, same box, \$99. I put it on down payment; I said I want that box--

[Laughter]

RCS: -- Does it work, they said yes, came back like the next day said I have the rest of your money tomorrow, go it and then that's the history of it.

MH: See in those days a down payment was very important.

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

MN: Who did the song, "On the Layaway?" Wasn't there -- there was an R&B song, oh the Isley Brothers.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: Then later on you had Master Don, and no I can't even say Master Don. You had the Force MD's they were called the Force MC's, and they even had, they had a Funk box at one time. And then it became a Funk box, it was a box where you manually played it but it was automatic. You would just hit a

key, you would push a key and it would play a rhythm once. And then Master Don made that colossal because he came out with the song “Funk Box,” God bless his soul.

MC: But also if you didn’t –

MN: But like somebody like Dougie Fresh.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: He took it –

MH: He took it to a different level.

RCS: They took that to another level. Now where the human Beatbox came in from, you had kids that were in school, that were not as fortunate as other people, as other kids and they couldn’t afford instruments. So what they did was, they started mimicking or manipulating these drum sounds with their mouths, sounded like percussions. So rather than go out and, you know, their mother their dad couldn’t buy a drum set, what have you they was like, you know, I’m going to sit in the house and I’m going to make a stand and they practiced and that’s how Dougie Fresh got started.

MH: Or sat in they class like –

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

RCS: So really the human Beatboxing, that was another level but, you know, [inaudible]. For the most part that was for the percussionists that couldn’t afford the percussion and they said, you know what, I need to do something to manipulate sound so I’m going to do it with my mouth.

MH: Very popular.

MC: That’s right, I remember –

RCJ: What about the battles of banging on the tables and stuff like that?

RCS: Oh yes, that’s the other thing. We used to do that and the first, the first – this is even before Hip Hop came out. We used to bang on the desks and the tables and the chairs, I got in trouble for that.

[Crosstalk, Beatboxing]

RCS: That’s where the human beatboxing – that was just another higher level.

MH: Took it to a different level.

RCS: And the good thing about it you didn’t have to spend no money to do it. You know what I mean, you didn’t need to have a dime in your pocket.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Now did the graffiti stuff have any connection to what you were doing or was that a totally separate thing?

MC: Well we was doing one thing.

MH: And another thing was happening.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: It was all part, it was all a part of, but it was like, at the time the DJ, you know Hip Hop – the DJing and the Emceeing and the Graffiti was like a whole separate entity because – I mean, they – I seen graffiti, you know when I was 11, 10, 9 years old, I wasn't thinking about Hip Hop then. People used to make their own magic markers, the uni's –

[Crosstalk]

RCS: -- and ink, and they used to make their own magic markers and stuff. But that – they just – later on, I don't know how it all got incorporated, but I think what happened with the dancing and the DJing and the guy on the Mic, they just kind of grouped it.

MH: Put it all together.

RCS: And they made it one big culture.

KJ: And that was an offshoot of the gangs too because people wanted to make their names known. So you had the spray paint so they were tagging each other so you – your name – you would go out and spray paint say well listen, I'm this person, whatever like that and just like Rob said, that all incorporated at the same time.

MC: What was that one guy?

RCS: Stay High?

MH: Stay High was one.

MC: Stay High, Stay Cool, yo Spade, no –

MH: I got the guys [inaudible]

RCS: I know Stay High is one of them because it's on the train.

MH: But this cat, this cat here – right here used to hit everything. Everything.

MC: And then there's Tracy 163, Tracy 163 and the other one, Blade.

RCS: Blade.

MC: Blade was like across the damn city you seen Blade.

MH: It used to get on the train tracks it was going into the tunnel side and all that.

MC: To see your name going from borough to borough was like forget it. It was almost like that [inaudible] It's like watch, they even had it timed. They was like watch, the number 5 train is going to come through right now.

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

RCS: Like Mel said, people, you know, people risked they life to do that. I mean people they were hanging off trains in freight yards and they didn't care.

MC: There's a countless amount of guys that actually lost their lives because – that people will never speak of, you know, because it was doing something that they – you know, most people were saying, you wasn't supposed to be doing it anyway.

[Crosstalk]

MH: He fell off that little piece up there, everyone was saying who – he wasn't supposed to be up there, what was he doing up there?

MC: Like a friend of mine, he went up – he wanted to tag his name on the top of the 4 train. And we said to him, “why you want to tag one on the top?” He said, “because you never know, when the helicopters and the planes go by –

[Laughter]

MC: The idiot, the idiot went up there, he tagged his name and when he was coming down he got caught and broke his shoulder. I said, “you lucky you only broke your shoulder.”

MN: Now there was a story you were telling before about Raoul spinning it from the top of a parking house.

RCS: Oh, this was, oh my God, let me tell you. Raoul, I'm going to tell you how that went, that was crazy. I used to live, like I said Raoul was in Mitchell projects, I'm at Monthaven projects, so somebody like via pigeon messenger used to go like, “yo Raoul's in the park and he's playing music.” Because somebody might in passing came from work or came from wherever and we like, What? We put on our clothes, put on our gear, we walk to the park, something I never seen before. Raoul – you hear the sound, but you hear it even more dynamic than before and it's just travelling! I said, “what the hell?” So we looking for Raoul, Raoul is on top of the parking house with these big Bass models [inaudible] and he's up there spinning. But the cool thing about that was that you didn't have to worry about nobody bum rushing your set, bumping into you and then for us DJ's who are trying to be exclusive with our records you couldn't – you didn't have a clue what he playing because you couldn't see the record, you got to look up at it.

[Laughter]

RCS: We used to DJ before, in order for another DJ not to bite your record, which means copy it –

MH: They used to take the tape.

RCS: we used to take tape, electrical tape, markers, spray paint.

MH: They covered it up so you wouldn't be able to see it.

KJ: Paper bags and [inaudible]

MN: That goes back to Kingston, Jamaica in early 50's when they started with the sound systems and they would take the best American R&B records, but they wouldn't want to let anybody know what they were so they were blacking it out.

RCS: And we used to put them in different jackets. I saw a jacket cover once I was like – Flash had this jacket, I was like “Wow! Bambaataa Reggae was the wrong choice!”

[Laughter]

RCS: But actually I'm glad you mentioned about, you know, Jamaican culture because really a lot of people don't give recognition that's due to Hip Hop. It really started to me anyway, from Jamaica because basically, I mean Cool Herc is from Jamaica because he brought – he introduced like the sounds –

MN: The heavy sound.

RCS: -- the big boxes, the heavy sounds, but not only that if you ever listen to some of the music that they played, they were the first ones to talk about selective rewind. And you hear a tape going backwards, you didn't hear the record. We just started doing that later on and they were the ones that would repeat a song, they would say, wait a minute, wait a minute, select it, bring it back and somebody, he would actually pick the record up by hand, start it all over in vinyl and start the record over. So I think from that, from that, you know, Flash or whoever, somebody took note of that and said, you know what, I'm going to take that and instead of it being silence, or having somebody talk I'm just going to keep manipulating the beginning of a song.

MH: I used to hear Frankie Crocker do that when he was on RL.

RCS: Yes, WWRL.

MH: WWRL, he used to play the record like Earth Wind and Fire –

RCS: That's on AM, on the AM dial.

MH: Right, just before he got to – he got to the end, he would say, “Give it to me again baby, straight to the top.” He used to always do that, all the time.

[Crosstalk]

MH: I used to hang out with Frankie Crocker at the Martinique, that's where a lot of Disc Jockeys used to hang out. G Keith Alexander, the Modern Man, [Inaudible], Kyle Jackson.

[Crosstalk]

MH: Those were guys I used to look up to man.

MC: Frankie Crocker the chief Rocker.

[Crosstalk]

MH: Frankie Crocker was the man!

MC: But you know what, there's not no radio station today that has a radio personality that would even reach the level that I feel of Frankie Crocker.

MH: He was a Hollywood Disc Jockey, a Hollywood Disc Jockey.

MC: He kept it clean, he kept it real and most importantly he made sure you knew who you was listening to.

MH: And he was one of those type of guys that gave you, "Slip and slide, keep your glide, I'm Frankie Crocker." Oh man he had all kinds of little sayings.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: He was one of the first Disc Jockeys to do the Apollo.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: If you played the Apollo, you were big.

MC: You know you big.

RCS: And the next person, I'm not going to say the next, but soon to follow was Hollywood.

MH: I was there.

RCS: And turned the Apollo out.

MH: The first night that Hollywood was at the Apollo theater where a DJ was out like that at a show place like that was Teddy Prince Razz show when Guy Fisher bought the Apollo theater. He played at intermission.

MN: Alan Jones has a lot about Guy Fisher in his book.

[Crosstalk]

KJ: We knew a lot of the people in there that's why I'm saying, you know, about the era, that's when it really got bad and that's when, you know, those folks you kept out because they was doing those little basketball tournaments, remember those basketball tournaments? And during those basketball tournaments they was doing they little other thing too.

MN: Well Alan, one of the chapters in his book is when he, he wasn't happy with his contract in Europe, he came back to the Bronx and started working out and then Guy Fisher ran a tournament in the St. Mary's park in '77 and he turned it out and then went back to Europe and stayed ever since. I'll send you that chapter when I get back if you leave me the email address.

MH: That's when I was playing ball, Pee Wee Kirkland and all of us were playing ball.

MC: My cousin JoJo.

[Crosstalk]

MH: And then and then like the gangsters wasn't getting the right recognition the people was putting them down so they started doing other things like we would do, you know, promote a game and clean they act up.

[Laughter]

RCS: I got to give a shout out to a culture in Hip Hop, well not even a culture, a group of people in Hip Hop who never get the recognition. These were the people, and ya'll going to verify, ya'll going to cosign this. The people who got you to your party was called who?

MC: OJ!

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

RCS: OJ was a car service.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: A luxury car service.

MN: That operated out of the Bronx?

MH: It was cab companies that where, and when you hung out at night you wanted a nice ride [inaudible]

MN: It was OJ in the Bronx. OJ's Car Service. Because we had Black Borough in Brooklyn.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: And what was the typical OJ? It was a 98 Regency [inaudible]

[Crosstalk]

RCS: And the next big one was, Godfather.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Was this a car service? Godfather Car Service?

MH: The key thing about this was you could keep the car on hold all night.

RCS: Well not all night.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: Godfather was located on 145th and 146th, 3rd Avenue. And I'm going to tell you, they used to – remember the garage they had right there? You, you would walk because you would have to pass them if you had to go to the train station and you see them, the cars would be sitting there all spanking clean, spanking clean.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Where was OJ's lo – that Godfather's was on –

RCS: Godfathers was the one on 3rd avenue.

[Crosstalk]

MH: They had a OJ's in the Bronx over here. They had a OJ's in the Bronx. They moved back and forth different areas.

MC: They had one in Harlem too, because it was – OJ's was just a type, it was just a name. You know when, there was various locations. So it's like, "where can I catch a OJ?" You never said, "where can I catch a cab?" It was like, "where can I catch an OJ?" Because it was a luxury car service.

MH: And it went from OJ to Godfather to Touch of Class.

RCS: Godfathers, they had the cars, they had the cars.

MH: That was some country brothers, where you got to go brother?

[Laughter]

RCS: But you know what, the thing was, not only did they get you there, they got you there with time to spare. I'll never forget, some – we had to go to like PAL on 183rd, we were playing. They must have got us from 143rd and that's like 40-something blocks, from 143rd to like 183rd in like 10 minutes. That's how fast they drove. But they, I mean, never had – as far as I – I've never seen an accident, you know, I never been in an accident with them, but they had, then they even call from Manhattan and Harlem, they were using New Yorkers.

[Crosstalk]

MH: And the thing about it is you would have your favorite driver, give me car 156. That's my man [inaudible]

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

MC: When I get in front of the fever, I'm going to roll down the window and turn up the tape a little bit.

[Laughter]

MH: And that's how the DJ's used to give the cab drivers their tips just to move around and blast them.

RCS: We would keep requesting, like that one driver and it's like wow, "what was that tape?" you know, "who had that Cold Crush tape?" "Who had the Fantastic tape?" "Yo I want that car."

MH: And then they'd be like listening to my man Rob while I ride around all the time.

[Laughter]

RCS: I think those cab drivers could have been the biggest promoters in Hip Hop history.

MH: Who sees more anyway than a chauffeur.

RCS: Right, they see it all.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: You know what the bad part about it? The catch was they weren't the typical cab drivers because they didn't have the TLC licenses, the TLC plates, no nothing.

MC: Everything was underground.

[Crosstalk]

MH: So it's like, you know brothers, one of ya'll sit up front man.

[Crosstalk]

MC: I remember one time I took a yellow cab all the way downtown from, we went to the Shadow or something, yo! When I got uptown it was me and Thautie, Thautie said, "Yo Mike, I ain't got no money." I was like, "Awww, Sh-"

[Laughter, Crosstalk]

MH: I remember Antoine used to always jump into cabs with me all the time, man Antoine used to fool them, right. So you ready? You ready? He busts out [inaudible] I can see him going down the block and I go into my pocket, "how much you cost?"

[Crosstalk]

MC: And that time, everything was, what Rob said earlier underground and Mel said also underground, that's where you found the culture, the real roots of it. You knew after you went to the Fever for a while, you knew you could go to the spot. You knew there was a spot somewhere that you could go to that was after the hours.

MH: There was always the club, Big Bens, Sin City.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Where's Sin City?

MH; Sin City was a beer spot over, over a beer spot and [inaudible]

[Crosstalk]

MH: Over at 137th and Morris, across from the projects right and you would go up there and hit the bright lights up and they could see you and you go in there, you dance on one side and you hit a door on this side, something's going on back there.

[Laughter]

MH: Otherwise and after hours spot.

MC: That was the first spot that the dance floor used to bounce.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: They had the wooden floor.

[Crosstalk]

MH: And you know who had the spot underneath? Julio and them, from the Mean Machine.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: This other Mean Machine is from the Sugar Hill Gang so we didn't know about each other. We were 143rd street Monthaven, Clark Park section and then we come to find out that there's another Mean Machine. We said, "what?"

[Crosstalk]

MH: They did the first sample to "Pull up to the Bumper."

RCS: When they came out with the record that's when I stopped using the name. Because I said, "you know what, I don't want no controversy," I said, "you know what, sometimes you got to know when you need to let sleeping dogs lie." So I was like ok, we started going by my name then, we started using Rockin' Rob and the Fabulous Four Emcee Connection and formerly Mean Machine.

[Crosstalk]

MH: And see that's funny because back in those days you didn't want use nobody's name, you didn't want your name to even sound like the person's name, but as the game starts going on you say, "no, I been around here too long." And I got to put something in front of this name or something around this name but this is my name.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: It was fine though.

MH: I didn't realize it was so deep until just now.

[Laughter]

MH: You know what I mean, just reminiscing on it.

KJ: Yes, exactly, until you get in a room you don't realize all that stuff that you did. We lived roughly almost 20 years within a 10 year space. Think about, think about it, because it just like Motown. If owners and I loved the Temptations, they – you go through their history and I told Rob that, we all played the temptations and we had very unique styles, Rob does the Hip Hop, I can do the R&B, Tiny does his thing, you got the rappers who do their own thing. So we got different – and we got those same personalities and it was very volatile and it was people that kept us together. Me and Rob stood together, me, T-Bird and Rob, we –

[End Tape 1, Side 2]

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

KJ: Think about Motown right and the era they did. Motown ear hit in the early 60's, the late 60's and it ran until the late – the early part of the 80's. The early part of Hip Hop was the same way. The classic, the cold classic time of Hip Hop, what we're talking about right now, that what it was all about.

MN: Now how long – when did it start to break up? When would you say?

RCS: I think when record companies took over.

MH: You right, when people got on contract. Couldn't give a damn about they boys no more.

RCS: Right. Because what happened was, the way I saw it, I mean, we were good until it was – we put on record form. You know, we were street performers, you put us in any park we did the damn thing [inaudible]. But then what happened – and the battles also, but then what happened was that when record companies started getting wind of what was out there, what they could do with a manipulator and you had people that was just looking for a way out. So like if people back then, they were living – people were living in tenement buildings. For those who don't know what tenement buildings are, these were these, like, old dilapidated type buildings with a fire escape.

MN: 5 stories with a fire escape in the front.

RCS: Right, with fire escapes and people didn't want to live like that anymore. And you had people that were on public assistance, you had people that – but they didn't take the fact of the way they were talented. So a record – somebody's out there, you walk into the store, just like somebody's harmonizing and you hear these young guys just doing a verse, so these guys, being at the right place at the right time say listen man, “you guys are good, you know, check this out, I want to sign you guys.” They didn't think about reading any contracts, they was like you know what, if this is going to get out of the neighborhood, I'm going to sign, I'm going to do whatever. Not knowing the fine print was you got to produce a record every 3-6 months and da da da da da.

MH: It's not like what you think.

RCS: So people started getting bored. And I'm not going to say it was like a sellout but just people were trying to do what they could do to survive to make a better way for them and their family.

RCJ: Without reading the fine print.

MH: But also thank God for the DJ's because the DJ's put a lot of artists that wasn't working back in business.

MC: They did, you know what, I'm sorry to cut you man, but when I was working with the Wiz I used to spin music in the Wiz and put the speakers outside on 3rd avenue.

RCS: I remember that.

MC: And the used to – the owners used to say, “Go ahead Mike, do whatever you want to do.”

MN: Now this is the 3rd avenue where

MC: On 153rd and 3rd Avenue.

[Crosstalk]

MN: So when – what years were you working there?

MC: Oh man, 86 [inaudible]

MH: Don't give the guy a headache.

MC: I can't remember it.

MH: The exact years.

[Crosstalk]

MC: '85, '86. So what I use to do is, going back to what we was just talking about, the love of the music. I used to play it, and just mix and I would practice and just play all day, but then I would notice and what Rob and everybody is trying to tell you is, when the money came into the love of it, the love was gone and the money became the love.

MH: All about the money, yes.

MC: Then, whereas, you, let's say you – me and him are friends for 20 some-odd years, or 15 years before all of that and the money came in, yo I don't want to be around you no more man. You know why, because I got this going on, I'm too busy, I can't hang out with my friends no more.

RCS: I'm too big for you now.

MH: Too big now.

MC: I'm too big. And then –

RCJ: Ego's got into the way.

MC: Right. And then you come swinging around in an OJ or something or in a Godfather, "Yo what's up people." And keep going. And then when it's all said and gone, you look for your people again and your people are like, "yo, man."

MH: That's just like Russell Simmons always said, "If I weren't a hit artist, I'd just go right back into the hood." They come a dime a dozen.

RCS: They hungry.

MH: But you see him over on MTV, he's rapping and he's really doing his thing, you find a little kid in the hallway doing the same thing.

RCJ: Only better.

MH: But not with money behind him and the music loud, he'll sit there and beat the bench and tear it up.

MC: But once that – once the money – see and then the other thing was the business end, see a lot of us growing up, we knew the love. We knew how going to the park, "Yo, I'm going to pull out my gear, I'm

going to get a cutie tonight, I'm going to get me a fly girl tonight." You pull – but when the money and the business came in, a lot of us didn't understand the business model. You know?

MH: And they sold themselves.

RCS: If you want to tell the difference between a DJ to this current day, and I'm going to tell you from living proof, and you get you a DJ that makes anywhere from 1,000 to 5,000 dollars a show and take a DJ who spins because of the love of what he does and you watch who's going to, I'm not going to say outperform who, but I want you to see who will inspire you or move you the most.

MH: Who's more spiritual. Because the money just makes you cold. You don't even want to perform the way you do, you know what I mean? You have a set script. It's like a person saying, hey give me a down payment and then I'll do my job. You pay me up front by the time you do the job, the money's gone and you just ain't got nothing to work for. But when you love it, it's different man.

KJ: Another part about this, the flip part about this is too is, you don't see folks doing like we do. There was a party every day! On a daily basis. Nobody had to go in and tell you to get paid. You went out there with your equipment, go to a house party, go outside and do it. They don't allow you to that now. You can't do that, and that's one of my pet peeves about this whole thing because – about the music. I love music period, because music is universal you can listen to any type of music and it gets you anywhere. The music that they got out here now is not music. The brother's that's all sitting here has some musical background. Most of the DJ's or whoever out here rapping, they have no musical background. I can read music, Rob can read music, right. The brothers in here can look at sheet music, listen to it and pick up a beat and all that.

MN: But see part of that is because they took the music out of the schools.

KJ: Right.

[Crosstalk]

MN: In the 70's they you know –

MH: But you know what. You know, they used to call Sammy Davis Jr. Mister Entertainer, he couldn't read music. He had the band director in the back, "Hey Joe, give me a little dot."

RCJ: Give him that ear.

RCS: You know who else couldn't read music Buddy Rich. My dad loved Buddy Rich and that's why I was like, "Oh Buddy Rich." I said – no not that he couldn't read music, Buddy Rich couldn't set his own drum set and I thought that was phenomenal. At the time, at the time when my dad – when I wanted my drum set I was like, "Yo dad" he's like, "oh Buddy Rich da da da da da." And I love Buddy Rich, don't get me wrong but then I did a little research and said, "You know, Buddy Rich don't even set up his own drum set, he can't, he said somebody else sets his drum set up for him." I said –

RCJ: Wow, you got to know your stuff man.

RCS: I said, "Yo dad! Your favorite can't set up his own drum set."

[Laughter, Crosstalk]

MH: But see these guys can play.

[Crosstalk]

MH: Look at James Brown, Dr. James Brown, so you know.

RCS: But you know what, right now, what is trying to happen is that we're trying to bring the love back to Hip Hop and I got to think Tools of War, Chris [inaudible]

RCJ: Thank you so much.

RCS: I really appreciate you for all you've done for me and you know my son as well for putting us on the map and you know, love you guys and thanks for keeping this culture called Hip Hop, Hip Hop and thanks for trying to keep true school true.

MN: And there are people out there keeping this – I mean I have my students, you know, and they have, you know, the beat making stuff in their rooms and like –

RCS: Limewire.

MN: -- You know, like this guy, Alex who is part of a Bronx, I guess, what do they call themselves? Bronx Beats, he just – he produces beats for anybody, in his part time he's like an admissions councilor at Manhattan College but he loves this stuff, he's not doing it for the money, he does it for the love. And they're all – and when Dolores does this show, which we're going to get you involved in, Mic Check, all these kids out of different projects, but also Fordham students, just great Emcees, great beat makers, there's a lot of talent. It – they're just not the ones being marketed.

RCS: Exactly.

MN: Or when they are, what the marketing takes away any of the spontaneity and the fun and the love. So -- but there's still a lot of good stuff going on.

RCS: Because that's like with the pioneers, the pioneers are not really getting the credit or the market that's due them, but we still do what we do, because you have the pioneers, or the icons and the legends and then you have today's DJ, today's Emcees and they making – this is billion dollar industry. And, you know, it's ok to say I'd props to shout outs to so and so, so and so. But meanwhile you giving me props and shout outs but you got a million dollar home.

MN: Yes, but I tell you something. I don't see that, I think it's the record industry people and the accountants and the lawyers who are making the money. Look, I got a place out in the Hamptons, in the hood in the Hamptons where the working people live and I'm telling you, you see a lot of people from investment banking, but you don't see a lot of Hip Hop people. You have Jay-Z and P. Diddy but that, you know –

MH: That's the rap.

MN: And I – It's the lawyers and the accountants and the executives; they're not that many people who make that money from this even now.

MC: The agents!

MN: And the Agents.

MC: Because I worked for William Morris for 4 years. Can't say no more about them, but I learned about them was, the agents and the agencies, they make 10% of what the total gross of an entertainer. So let's say if you're making 500 million, that company is making money off you. Not only are they making money off you but then your major – like back in the days there used to like the promoter for Flash, what was his name?

MH: Ray Gray

[Crosstalk]

MC: Right, Greg Chandler.

MN: Greg Chandler, I know him he was in here also.

MC: He was the biggest promoter in the Bronx.

MN: He now runs something called RCA Productions. They put on the big shows –

[Crosstalk]

MH: He works right there in [inaudible] Central.

MC: Yes! He was doing the Apollo too, he was the head, him and Bam from the Fever.

MH: Yes, he's still there.

MC: But what I was getting at was – damn I just forgot it. Damn see now –

MH: It's all coming back.

MC: Damn, see now –

RCS: You was talking about if you make 500 Million dollars.

MC: Right, so, so the agents – and thank you Rob – and the agencies are making the money off of the clients and that's what they look at them as. They look at them as clients. Now the problem that I see is, a lot of these Hip Hop artists that are making all of these millions of dollars, they're not investing the money into let's say their health insurance. That's the biggest thing.

MH: No pension.

MC: No pension. You know, the biggest investment is like a big house. There's one rapper right now he bought a house for 2 Million, 2 hours outside of New York, he's trying to sell it for 10 Million, in the Times it said, nobody's going to buy it.

MH: But you know what kills me, they talk about their houses, they talk about their jewelry, but they never talk about the kids what to stay from to get there. And they never speak about what stopped them. Alright, I used to hear about you for 5 years straight, what happened to you? Something happened. What stopped you from getting there so somebody can learn about that. Because I've been on certain sets and

close to certain sets where I see big boys on the way down. And I don't know what happened, how they got back up, I know something had to change up for them to come back up. But what you supposed to speak about what to stay away from so you don't have to go through what they went through. Nobody speaks about that, they only speak about the glitter, but that's a lot to get there.

RCS: It is, it's a lot to get there.

MH: It's a lot to get there! You got to stay disciplined man.

MC: But that's one of the subjects we're working on, Mel and myself, we're working on a segment for the Bronxmedia.tv where we're going to be digging into finding out what happened to certain artists that were here and then next thing you know they just –

MH: It suck that somebody got to learn from it. You know what I mean and you got to keep – you can't write a book about a story. And true stories sell.

RCJ: True, it's from the start.

MN: Well wait until you read what I'm going to send you from this *Rap That Got Away*.

MC: Also I want to just mention, last year, Rob and Mel, as well as Rob's son, they did the New York City Marathon. In the heart of the South Bronx.

MH: Stage, everything hooked up. We had it nice.

MC: It was so, it was like off the wall. Because we had people from Japan, Germany, everywhere.

MH: Russia, everywhere.

MC: They were running, but they had to stop because they heard the music. I mean we had runners stop and get on state and –

MH: Dance.

MC: -- just start trying to dance.

RCS: Or do the electric slide.

[Laughter]

MH: Do the Chicken Noodle Soup.

[Crosstalk, Laughter]

MH: We had a dude with a whole chicken suit on.

MC: What was the guy? The Dunkin Donuts guy.

RCS: The Donuts cup.

MC: He was running and he got on stage to do the Chicken Noodle Soup Dance.

RCS: Runners came and took pictures, they stopped and took a picture and then they ran.

MH: And when we found out where he was from we announced it you know?

MC: Right, so that goes back to how when, what Rob was saying, if you have a DJ playing for the love of it and one who comes in and just says, “Well ok, what’s my set? This is the set, alright, boom.” It’s a whole different – the one who does it for the love of it has a skill – this is what I have to say, has a skill set that’s, you have to have it in order to produce it and the one who comes in with that, “well this is what I’m going to –“ He has to practice every day to keep it going. He has a – it’s like a book, he opens his book and it only goes to chapter 1, he never gets to chapter 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 because the love of it is no longer there. But for the DJ’s that do it for the love, they go through the whole book, then they, the next thing you know, they’re building an encyclopedia.

RCJ: [Sings] never ending story!

[Laughter]

MC: Right, because what happened that day, last year. We had, 1, 2, was it 4? Or 3 DJ’s at one time?

[Crosstalk]

RCS: It was –

MC: What’s his name? Who was it

MH: There was another guy.

MC: Yes.

RCJ: Starts with a J right?

RCS: Jazzy G.

MH: and Chuck C.

MC: Out of nowhere.

RCS: Chuck played but he didn’t do the carousel.

MC: Out of nowhere, they just had a record, Rob was scratching it, boom, boom, next thing you know, they just started rotating and everybody kept catching on to the beat.

MH: Everybody was like, check these guys out over here, it was deep, you know?

RCJ: The talent bar kind of went down since the years went up, you know, it’s like the talent bar now, even of people that I feel like that’s in the industry, when you listen to the radio it’s not the same feel that I feel from ya’ll music.

MN: We had LA Sunshine in here from the Treacherous 3 and he gave me one of his tapes and when I heard them speed rapping I said, “Oh my God.” These guys are talented.

RCS: See, there's a lot of people now you can't even say that work. You can just say, you know what, they doing what they got to do, they making they money, that's all you can say. I like music that, it gives me chills, to the point where you sing stuff and it makes me go, "Wow!"

MH: You could have a Rolls Royce, I can have a Rolls Royce.

MN: I'm going to come, on the way out I'm going to play you some music I picked up in Germany from and Emcee named Killa Hakan. Hakan, from, they're Turkish guys from Berlin who, you know, they're the minority there and they're – they seized on Hip Hop as a way to express what they're doing. And around the world this stuff is still alive. This stuff is alive all over.

MH: More alive than in here.

MN: In Senegal, in Berlin, in Paris.

[Crosstalk]

RCS: I'm glad you said that because I had the opportunity with a good friend of mine, his name is, [inaudible], they call him Kukor, he's out in Belgium, in Brussels and he gave me the opportunity to travel to Belgium to perform which was the most enlightening, fulfilling thing in my life.

MN: Well I'm, I have very good connections in Berlin. So I'm going to, you know, let you guys, you know.

[Laughter]

RCS: The point I'm making with this is that Hip Hop in New York is so taken for granted. When I went out there and they found out I was a DJ number 1, when they found out I was from New York, and when they found out I was Hip Hop DJ that was it. People were, I mean no exaggeration, people were giving me the keys to their home to stay, they said if you ever need a place to stay, here's my keys. They was like, what are you doing tomorrow? I'm going to take you around. They were so taken and I didn't even perform yet. That was before performing, then when I performed, they was like, Oh I want to show you around, oh come here. We got free food, I mean they wanted my jacket, I was like, I don't know about that.

MH: Everybody treat you so much different.

RCS: I mean the hospitality is so different, but what I like about it is such a strong appreciation for it.

MC: Can you two brothers do one thing real quick? Just show everybody what you got on your feet man?

[Crosstalk]

RCS: Mel got on a pair of Playboys, and so do I. We got on the same playboys actually. These are a throwback from when we was in elementary school, these were the schools of choice and we didn't have these shoes growing up.

MN: Ok, now I got a question for you. Because this is from the Allen Jones book. Ok, where these stores were located and I got to write this down. Wait a minute, wait a minute, Bly's shirt shop, what shirt?

RCS: Who? Wise?

MN: The Bly, Bly's shirt shop.

MH: 125th street.

[Crosstalk]

MN: Where's Lathans?

MH: Lathan's was on 40something Street.

MN: Mr. Tony's?

MH: Mr. Tony's was in Queens? Jamaica Avenue.

RCJ: He had the gear.

MH: Jamaica Avenue, they used to have the shark skins, the beaver hats, the Bly's, the leather fronts –

[Crosstalk]

RCS: I know about British Walkers on 125th and Atlantic, which they not there anymore. I knew about Florshine on 3rd Avenue and there was one in Harlem and I knew about AJ Lesters.

MH: But at Lathans you could go to Lathans and get a pair of pants tailor made and have the same material in your shoes.

MN: And that was on 42nd street?

[Crosstalk]

MH: They would match it up for you, best believe it. Get your name on your shoes, way before you seen FuBu and all that. Gators with your name, Mel, right there.

[Crosstalk]

Unknown Woman: Are you guys going to continue more because I only have [inaudible]

MN: It think we – I think we ought to cut it –

MH: Because you know what, we can go home.

[Crosstalk]

KJ: I just want to say one thing though. I want to say one thing. Another thing that is taken for granted about the Hip Hop, just look at the records, the 45, the giant 45, if it wasn't for Hip Hop that would've been done because we kept the 45, the giant 45 going because of the DJ's. I believe for the music today to survive, to bring back the old music is going to take the DJ's the mobile DJ's to go back out there.

MH: And they doing it.

[Crosstalk]

KJ: Like Mel had said about [inaudible]. Like what you call it was saying about working at the Wiz you got to play the music out there. Because Evelyn Champagne King wouldn't have been as bad as she was if it wasn't for the DJ's. You could – I sit right here and name several artists, if it wasn't for us during the 80's and the 70's, the late 70's and the early, the late 80's that wasn't playing those giant 45's their record sales wasn't been as high as they were.

MH: I just want to say 1 thing. If you play any type of music, you need some God in you, because if you ain't got God in you won't have no soul to give. You need soul. You know, when you empty you ain't got nothing to give. When you got soul you have lots to give.

MN: Ok, thank you so much. This was amazing.

RCS: Thank You.

[End of Interview]

