



Fordham University  
**Fordham Research Commons**

---

Oral Histories

Bronx African American History Project

---

12-21-2006

## David, Patricia

Bronx African American History Project  
*Fordham University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://research.library.fordham.edu/baahp\\_oralhist](https://research.library.fordham.edu/baahp_oralhist)

 Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

David, Patricia. Interview with the Bronx African American History Project. BAAHP Digital Archive at Fordham University.

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Bronx African American History Project at Fordham Research Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of Fordham Research Commons. For more information, please contact [considine@fordham.edu](mailto:considine@fordham.edu), [bkilee@fordham.edu](mailto:bkilee@fordham.edu).

Transcriber: Rochelle Ballin

Mark Naison: We give people copies of everything we do -- of the transcript and the tape.

Patricia David: [unintelligible]

MN: Today is December 21, 2006. We are here with Patricia David, who is an executive of CitiGroup who grew up in the South Bronx. So we begin as always asking about your family.

How did your family get to the Bronx?

PD: That is a good question. My parents Jeanette and Thomas De Blanc are from a small island called Dominica in the French West Indies. Very large family, my mother has a lot of brothers and sisters and so does my father. In 19- I want to say 54 or somewhere thereabouts they went to England. They wanted to come to America, but to get to this country at the time they had to go to England because England owned Dominica back then, now they have their independence. My parents went to England, got married there and had three children. I'm one of the three. Then in 1959, just after I was born, my dad came to this country alone on a boat. You know the story, people getting sick, people swaying back and forth. He was sponsored by his sister I believe to come to America.

Natasha Lightfoot: That's what I was going to ask you -- which family member was here?

PD: My dad. My dad came first, but his sister was here --

NL: His sister was here and he got sponsored. I see.

PD: We started out in Queens --

NL: Did he work? Do you know where he worked?

PD: He did. I know the jobs that he had. I don't know the first job he had, but was a superintendent of a building in the South Bronx, which is where we lived.

MN: What was the address of the building?

PD: I want to say -- 767 Tremont Avenue or 747 Tremont Avenue.

MN: So it was on Tremont between where and where?

PD: I have no idea. It was on the corner. It was a tenement of 50-60 family homes and he was the superintendent so we lived on the ground floor and we paid no rent but --

MN: Right.

PD: -- worried about other people's stuff. He sent for my mother who came here alone with me and my brothers and sisters on a plane and they landed in Idlewild Airport, which is now JFK.

My mother didn't work until I was sixteen. My father held different jobs while he was a superintendent because he was able to still work because my mother really became the superintendent of the building because my father wanted to have other income. He was a shipping clerk in the Garment District in Manhattan. The company that he worked for was owned by brothers who made silk ties and scarves.

NL: Was he unionized, do you know?

PD: He was not in a union, no. That was his only job in this country.

MN: How old were you when you came to this country?

PD: Three months old.

MN: You were three months old.

PD: I was born in Birmingham, England but I am an American by trade I guess.

MN: What were your first recollections of your building and your neighborhood?

PD: Oddly enough, when my father got sponsored by his sister, he was able to sponsor other family members so the majority of the people that lived in the building were family members.

MN: [crosstalk] You had a whole building of relatives

PD: -- my aunt lived in the building. My mother is one of I think eleven and many of them came here. My father is one of twelve, of which many of them came here. So as family members come they got an apartment and we had a lot of relatives in the building. Then one of my father's brothers was also able to become a superintendent of another building and that's how we kind of started a Dominica enclave.

MN: Do you recall whether this was more towards the Grand Concourse or more toward the East Bronx.?

PD: It was more towards -- I'm going to tell you in a minute -- I went to school on Daly Avenue, so it wasn't too far from Daly Avenue. I went to Saint Thomas Aquinas High School.

MN: OK.

NL: OK.

PD: We would be able to walk to Tremont Avenue on the strip and go shopping. So it was --

MN: Saint Thomas Aquinas is right near Crotona Park.

PD: Yes. That area.

MN: Did that neighborhood have many Jewish and Italian families?

PD: When we moved in, it was primarily Jewish families. Somewhere along the ways, maybe in the 70s, it turned different.

MN: Right.

PD: Then you had the graffiti. You had the buildings that were less occupied. Meaning they were burnt out and still being lived in. That sort of thing.

MN: Right.

PD: It became dangerous.

MN: Now do you --

NL: As a child, I was wondering, did you feel safe there?

PD: I didn't know any better. I felt safe because there were so many family members there.

NL: Of course.

PD: There was a time in my preteens or when I was a teenager, my joke would be -- in front of the building we has a public school, I think it was PS 138, was across the street -- so I had two choices to walk to school. I could go this way where we had prostitutes or this way we had drug addicts. I would mix it up everyday.

MN: PS 138 was --

PD: Right across the street from me.

NL: 138 is in Castle Hill.

PD: PS 132

NL: 132. Ok.

PD: PS 132 -- it was right across the street from my house.

MN: Now --

PD: I went to Catholic school from kindergarten on up.

NL: I was going to ask you what was the decision making process that led your parents to send you to Catholic school?

PD: They're Catholic.

[laughter]

PD: Mostly Dominica are Catholic and --

NL: No, I didn't know if it was a judgment call --

PD: I don't think my parents believed that the public school system would be good for us. Back then, and still today, I think, that the Catholic school teaches religion. You could get confirmation, communion, and all your sacraments there --

NL: Exactly.

PD: -- where as in public school you need to take that off line and it's not a part of the practice of teaching.

MN: Right

PD: I would say that --

MN: Did you go to a parish elementary school?

PD: Saint Thomas Aquinas.

MN: Oh Saint Thomas Aquinas parish.

PD: Yes, on Daly Avenue. It was a school and a church.

MN: Ok

PD: Kindergarten up until eighth grade.

MN: There is also an Aquinas High School.

PD: My sister went to the high school --

MN: Which is a girl's school?

PD: And I went to Cardinal Spellman.

MN: You went to Cardinal Spellman, ok.

PD: And my brother went to Mount Saint Michael.

MN: Ok

PD: And my younger sister went to Cardinal Spellman because we were still living -- after many years of living in the South Bronx, my parents saved up to buy a house. They bought their first house, it was on 3913 De Reimer Avenue in the Bronx.

NL: Up in the Northeast Bronx.

PD: Just off of Baychester Avenue, two blocks from Cardinal Spellman.

NL: I was going to say, you walked to school

MN: So how old were you when you moved from the South Bronx?

PD: I just started high school, so I suppose 16.

MN: Right. Now were you on Tremont Avenue during the years of the blackout?

PD: Yes.

NL: What was that like?

MN: Because this is --

PD: I remember looting. I remember confusion.

MN: Because Tremont Avenue was hit fairly hard.

PD: Yes it was. A lot of looting. I remember a lot of people pushing things they didn't --

NL: Didn't buy?

PD: Yes. It wasn't a safe place. I remember when we first moved there, when it was a Jewish neighborhood. It was a pretty safe place. Things just looked different and then somewhere along the way, you woke up in the morning and the place just looked different. And people started to move out. I would say that we moved out just in time. I think if we had stayed, we wouldn't have been able to get out.

MN: Now --

NL: I had a question actually. Just backtracking a little bit about your identity growing up.

Because you lived in such a close knit family and you were surrounded by Dominicans, did you strongly identify with Dominica?

PD: I had first been -- when I first went to school, it was at Thomas Aquinas, we were asked to fill out a form. I think we were in either fifth or sixth grade, and we had to identify what our ethnicity was. It said Black, White, or Other. So I took it home because I was never asked that question before. I said mom what do we put in. She said put other and she said put British West Indian American. Because I am a British citizen. I was naturalized in America when I was seven years old and my parents were West Indian. My mother would never consider herself black. She refuses to call herself black.

NL: Meaning that she felt like black -- African American was your identity. And your mother didn't want to be called black.

PD: No because it was a negative connotation.

NL: Meaning black American. And what did she think of black people in America?

PD: Don't ever call her that. They were horrible.

NL: Why were they horrible?

PD: The news was not helpful, but the people that she would see in the street, that to her were African American black people, just didn't look right, in terms of dress. They didn't clean the front of their houses. They never seemed to be well-educated, used foul language. They were always the ones carrying the guns, didn't have any desire to be more than what they were. Just bad people -- unbelievably bad people.



NL: And so did you feel that there was a difference in the way she lived in the Tremont section versus when she moved to De Reimer Avenue?

PD: No, because we were probably the first black people on De Reimer Avenue.

NL: That's what I was going to ask you. Had the neighborhood become Caribbean yet?

PD: No, we were the ones.

NL: What was that like, desegregating that neighborhood?

PD: I remember looking out the window after we moved in -- and its row houses, right -- and I'm think 'who am I going to go outside and play with?' Because when live and Tremont Avenue you didn't go outside and play.

MN: So you didn't grow up playing in the street?

PD: That's correct.

MN: Which is so --

PD: I had cousins in the building and they were my age so we played with our family.

MN: Did --

NL: Inside the hallways --

PD: Inside the hallways and in the backyard where their was nobody to --

MN: Right. Now --

PD: Because my dad was superintendent so the backyard was a part of it.

MN: Right. That's very different from people in my generation older who all played in the street.

PD: My mother would not let us play in the street. We never had bicycles until we moved to De Reimer Avenue.

NL & MN: Wow

MN: So basically you --

NL: You moved in the neighborhood when it was on its way to what it became?

PD: Yes. So we were the first ones and we didn't know until we realized it. We didn't move there thinking are we the first ones because we were never exposed to anything but the people that were around us that looked like us. My friends are my family. I didn't have friends like people have friends in school I didn't have a buddy. If I wanted to play with somebody, I had a cousin that was my age.

MN: Right. So --

NL: Did you grow up speaking patois?

PD: My parents spoke it in the home quite often so I listened to it growing up.

MN: Could you speak a little patois for us?

PD: No, I cannot.

[laughter]

PD: My grandmother used to speak patois only when she didn't want us to know what she was saying. I could understand it but I didn't grow up speaking it.

MN: Right

NL: Ok

MN: What was your school experience like?

PD: Oh, it was great. Elementary school was great. High school was great. High school was probably the first chance I got to do school activities. I was one of -- not one of -- I was the first black twirler. I was the captain of the twirl --

NL: Oh, you were a twirler?

PD: I was a flag thrower. My daughter is in the color guard now at high school.

NL: Oh, you're kidding. [laughs]

PD: So that was kind of fun because I never joined any clubs at Fordham. I was so busy working at Burger King as a manager and making -- to pay my tuition. I was the first to graduate from college in my family. My family could not financial --

MN: Were you the first child?

PD: I'm the third child.

MN: You're the third child, but the first to go to college. What did your siblings do?

PD: They went to the military.

NL: I was going to ask you --

MN: Were they both boys or --

PD: My brother is the eldest by two years. My sister is the next one by one year and then there is me.

MN: Right

PD: Then I have a sister that is six years younger.

MN: Now did your siblings remain in the military as a profession?

PD: My brother stayed there for four years and then went to go on and live in Seattle and has not come back since. So he has training as a naturopathic doctor, but he plays music and makes paper. He lives the life of Grizzly Adams I guess is how I would say. He did not join the establishment. My sister stayed in the military a lot longer. She was in the Air Force and she went to London and stayed there for a while. Then she went to Hawaii and stayed there for a

while. Then after, I think 12 years, she got out. Her husband is still in the military. He has been there for 25 years and they live in Virginia. Now she is getting her education back on track. She is going for interior design. In one more year, she'll have an education and she will be able to open her business if that's what she likes. But I was the first to go through the whole graduating cycle with the whole cap and gown and graduating.

NL: Did any of your other family members start their own business when they came here?

PD: There was an attempt by my father's brother and sisters by to start a business for book publishing and that did not work out. There was an attempt by my father's brothers and sisters to start a real estate -- not business, but investment and that did not work out. As many time as we say we are such a big family we should have something like the Kennedys, we just never pulled it off.

NL: Were you in touch with other Dominicans in the area?

PD: We go to the Dominican Day Parade. We would --

MN: Where was the Dominican Day parade located?

PD: It was in Queens.

MN: It was in Queens.

NL: There were a lot of Dominicans --

PD: They were everywhere.

NL: What neighborhood in Queens?

PD: I'm going to say Hollis, Queens.

MN: Was there a Dominican fraternal organization in the city, with a clubhouse?

PD: Not a physical -- not that we had ever been to. We would go to someone's house. There would be Dominicans and there would be someone who would want to keep the Dominicans connected, so you would go to someone's house. So John Q would host it maybe this weekend and someone else would host it, but we would all know when the party would be. It would be in a place not too far from -- you know that place in Queens where they have those two big structures that were on that movie with Will Smith? Those two big spaceships --

NL: Oh.

MN: Oh, the World's Fair.

PD: So the hotel would be somewhere in that neighborhood and every year, we would go and buy tickets and that's who you would fund the association.

NL: And did you go back and forth to Dominica?

PD: Yes. I've been about twelve times. I go almost every year with my family. The first time I went my father had won the Irish Pool. He came home one day and said that we had won a pool. I'm thinking where are you going to put a pool in a freaking tenement. So he's like no we won the lottery. We were upset because he said we won a pool, but where were you going to put it.

NL: Right. So your father had access to stuff in the street that you guys were sheltered from.

PD: So we won the pool and our first trip was to go back home when I was about twelve and then we were able to go every year.

MN: Now your neighborhood was one of the areas where hip-hop evolved. Is that something you were aware of going on?

PD: No. Nope. We were pretty sheltered. My mother was very protective.

NL: Did you listen to any music at all in your home?

PD: It was all Caribbean music. Whatever my dad wanted to listen to is what we listened to. I didn't have my own music center. I didn't have my own TV. I had nothing of my own.

NL: Really, so you didn't even watch TV shows growing up or anything like that?

PD: Whatever my dad wanted to watch. And my mom. So it would be 'I Love Lucy'-- you know the sitcoms that you would watch. 'Moving on Up'-- whatever the sitcoms were back in the 70s.

MN: But the popular music of the time was not something you were immersed in?

PD: No. It was all Caribbean music.

NL: You had a very strong Caribbean identity.

PD: We weren't cool that way. My daughter now grows up with -- she knows what's happening in the world in terms of music and shows and we were clueless.

NL: So did you access -- how did you socialize in the new neighborhood? Did the neighbors in the De Reimer Avenue area [crosstalk, inaudible]

PD: They did and it's weird because I remember looking out the window this one day -- everything is unpacked and we had this big front big window. I'm looking outside and I see this girl doing the same thing. She was an only child. Her name was Rosanne and she reached out "want to play? So that was my first friend. I envied her because she was an only child, I figured this child must have everything and she envied us because we had brothers and sisters.

MN: So this is when you were 16? So your first friend outside your family was --

NL & MN: Wow

PD: We just never went anywhere --

NL: It was with family --

PD: And my parents, Dominica oriented activities.

[crosstalk]

PD: We were not [inaudible] Catholics. We would go to church every Sunday.

MN: At St. Thomas Aquinas.

PD: Yes at St. Thomas Aquinas

NL: So you still went back even when you were on De Reimer Avenue?

PD: Yes. Then we started to go to the St. Francis of Assisi, which was closer because my sister -  
- my younger sister -- was still going to that school to graduate. We wanted to finish her in the  
school that she started in. When we congregated as a family, it was all Caribbean. It was all West  
Indian. It wasn't a --

MN: Was there much discussion of politics in your family?

PD: No. Religion more than anything else. Religious things. In terms of the news world.

Anywhere from -- there's a person that rapes somebody, they should be killed.

NL: [laughter]

PD: I'm just kidding.

[laughter]

PD: Not politics -- my dad would read from the Bible every night and we would say prayers.

[cell phone rings]

MN: Is this --

NL: Oh, that's her phone --

[pause in recording]

NL: So you were saying you had a very religious upbringing. Reading the Bible every night.

PD: The church and the family were the nucleus to our home. If my parents couldn't take us to a party, they wouldn't leave us with anybody. They wouldn't leave us with the babysitter or au pairs and all that stuff.

MN: And you had no independent social life from your family?

PD: That's correct.

MN: Wow.

PD: So in high school for me to join a club --

NL: That's what I was going to ask you. How did that happen?

PD: It was almost like a rite of passage because my sister had gone before me and she wasn't there to lead me and my brother had gone before her so he was there to lead her. So I was the first that had stayed home longer, if you will, so I learned to drive at home. I learned to cook at home. I was -- me and my mom were best friends because my dad went to work and I was with my mom and I helped her take care of my younger sister, who was six years old. She was like my baby doll, but she was alive.

[laughter]

PD: That's how I look at it. That's sister who took care of you growing she was so [unintelligible] because that's the role you play when mommy's busy. Then when I was about 17 my mother began to work for the first time as a nurse's aid in a nursing home. Split Rock Nursing Home.

NL: Right. I remember Split Rock.

PD: Then she worked a little bit on Mosholu Parkway for many years. That was her first job. Just to get out of the house and have additional income. That's how we did it.



MN: Now where did your college aspirations come from? Was it something that your teachers --

PD: Spellman was prep for Fordham. I applied to one school and that was Fordham. I couldn't afford to apply to many other schools. It was expensive. Back then it was, I'm sure it's more now. I wanted to be a lawyer.

MN: So why did you choose CBA rather than Fordham College?

PD: I had no other person to tell me anything other than that. I was the first one so I couldn't say to my parents 'Oh jeez, what do you think? Should I go to CBA or the college?' I had no advisors in that way. Fordham looked like a nice school. It wasn't far. No one in front of me went away in a dorm. I was the first one.

MN: Now did you live on campus?

PD: No. I could not. I had to pay my college fees. I had to work at Burger King on Baychester Avenue.

NL: Before we get into your Fordham experience, I wanted to know what Spellman was like in the 70s. Was it very racially mixed?

PD: You its funny because the school, I think two years before I started to go there, was split by gender. If you actually go to the school, today one side has girls' locker rooms and bathrooms and the other side has --

NL: Of course. The high side and the low side.

PD: So I think by the time I started to go there, it wasn't racially diverse, but it didn't seem to matter. I didn't feel like I stuck out. I didn't feel different because I was black. Maybe it was because I was the lead twirler and maybe that's the thing that people over looked. I don't even

think that people that I knew there felt that it was blacks against whites against Hispanics and Asians. I didn't feel that at all.

NL: Were you ever conscious of race growing up or even skin color differences in your family?

PD: Not until my first job out of college.

NL: Really. That's when you first felt race?

PD: I went 'Ah ha'!

NL: And what was that experience like?

PD: At Fordham University at the time, I don't know if this is still the practice today, but when you graduate you want to get a job, right? So we used to have a lottery system, where you would put your name in the hat of companies you would like to have interview you. I was able to get interviews with three companies. One was -- I want to say General Foods, another one was another marketing company, I forget, but -- I was in there and this woman was interviewing me and within thirty seconds, she makes me an offer. I looked at her and said, 'Well we didn't even have a conversation.' It was one of these start-up jobs where you get out of college and work a year in a company and you switch. She said something and I looked at her. She said that I would be an affirmative action hire.

NL: Wow.

PD: I knew what that meant and I knew I didn't want to be an affirmative action hire because you are telling me that you are hiring me because of the color of my skin. One of us is leaving this room and it's not me. I told her, I said 'I don't think this is going to be the place for me. I'm not going to come work for you company because I'm black. If you want me to work for your company it's because I'm good.' Then I got up and I walked out, knowing that I need the job.

NL: Right, right.

PD: That's the first time I ever realized 'Huh? Oh you're looking at this?' It drove me nuts.

MN: What about social life? Were you dating in high school?

PD: Never dated.

NL: And at Fordham?

PD: No I didn't. I had -- there were two guys in my life. I wouldn't call them dating. One was Haitian, a very good friend of the family so he went to my prom and I went to his prom. He was a friend of the family. And my husband. My husband and I got to know each other because when my sister came back from the military was dating my husband's uncle and my cousin married my husband's aunt. So when they had parties he would go and I would be there.

MN: Is he also from Dominica?

PD: He was born in Trinidad, but raised in Grenada. He came to this country at the age of 16. He finished high school and then went to the military for four years.

NL: And was he from the Bronx too?

PD: Queens. He was from Queens.

NL: Queens. Ok. So now, at Fordham, what was your experience like with other classmates?

Did you find that even the campus here was --

PD: You wouldn't even know that I came to this school. I would come in in a sweatshirt and jeans, do my classes and go straight to the Burger King on Baychester Avenue and work until the end of the night as a manager. Close the store. Went home, did my studies, wake up and do the same routine again.

NL: Wow.

MN: How did you get the job as a manager? Did you start out --

PD: I started out on the fry station.

MN: Now was that in high school?

PD: That was in high school. The same guy, the Haitian guy that was my friend worked there and said 'Hey, why don't you come work at Burger King?' I'm like 'Are you crazy?'

MN: What was the Burger King staff like? Who were the people who were working there with you?

PD: 16 and 17 year old kids that didn't want to be there, essentially. The manager -- the owner was a man who was Argentinean, Augusto Castillo. It was one of these Burger Kings that was owned by three or four people that put their money together and owned three or four stores. So this guy Roland, his name was Roland, pulled me aside and said 'Ok, let's go for the job.' I got the job, making two dollars an hour. Back then, that was minimum wage.

MN: So you were on the fry station --

PD: Yes and then they [unintelligible] and the guy said 'We're going to move you to project leader' and I said ok fine and then the next thing I know I'm the manager of the store.

[cell phone rings]

MN: Hello

[background talk between PD and NL]

MN: Hello. Oh Jesus Christ. Oh well.

NL: If not we'll just eat it after you leave.

PD: I'm not hungry. Don't worry about me.

NL: I wanted to ask you -- are we recording?

MN: Yes.

NL: Was the Burger King safe at the time that you were managing it?

PD: Yes-- If you recall on the news -- I'll tell you some things that happened there.

NL: Ok.

PD: If you remember on the news, maybe a month ago, there was a manager that shot a --

[cell phone rings, break in recording]

PD: -- an attendant. That was at that Burger King on Baychester Avenue because he gave him lip basically. I was robbed two times by a shotgun.

MN: This is in the store. So when you say they robbed the store --

PD: I'm in the store; we're closing, so the doors are closed. My workers are cleaning up the kitchen, cleaning up the fry station, cleaning out the bathrooms and the dining room. Somebody taps on the side door and one of the workers thought that the person that was tapping was a friend of someone at the store, so he opened the door. We always tell the employees do not open the door after we close them. He opens the door and I'm in the back counting the money, doing what I do as a manager. All of a sudden, he gets access to the kitchen. He had a shotgun that is bigger than my arm and he said 'Give me all the money.' I said you know what, it's not my money, here's the money. I gave him all the money. This was a short Hispanic guy with pock marks on his face. First time I've ever seen a gun this big and I'm thinking this is bad because if he is nervous he will just shoot me just for sport. I was scared out of my wits. So I give him the money and he lets us go. Three days later, I'm in the kitchen -- I'm in the dining room and I'm coming to the door going to the kitchen and I feel somebody tap me on the shoulder. And I'm looking at this man and I'm saying 'Where have I seen this man before?' He says to me 'You

were so good to me three days ago, I came back for more.' Robs me again. Three days later -- I call the police so they put a man in front -- I'm at the cash register and I see a line of people and this guy is right there next to me, pulls out the gun and puts it by the register so no one sees it and says 'Can I come in the back?' So now we're friends right. So, finally, the cops catch the guy. He had been robbing people up and down Boston Road the last couple of months. They wanted me to ID him and I IDed him. That was my experience there.

MN: Did you have any other experiences of being robbed in your neighborhood or walking? So this was just in the store?

PD: In the store, yes. It was -- my mother had gotten knocked on a few times when she was going to work on the bus.

[Background talk. Break in recording]

PD: She would take the bus at night around 11 o'clock on the corner of Laconia and I think it was Baychester Avenue. One time -- my dad would always wait for her at the bus stop, but the bus got there before he got there and someone knocked her around and took her pocketbook, that sort of thing.

NL: Wow. So the neighborhood, even up there, was changing.

PD: It was changing and that was two blocks from the 47<sup>th</sup> Street Precinct.

NL: Oh wow and what year was this?

PD: I would say was probably in the 80s.

MN: Do your parents still live in the same house?

PD: 35 years they lived there and 15 years ago, they moved back to Dominica. Their goal was to come here and have a better life for their children and then to go back to Dominica. They never intended to stay and retire to Florida --

NL: Many West Indians --

PD: So they built their house. They paid cash and they moved back home. They'll be here in Georgia tonight, but they went back home. They had no intention of staying in the country. They lived their dream. The minute they saw that their kids were ok my dad said 'That's it I'm leaving.' He quit his job and told my mother to quit her's too. She said ok. She liked to work, get out of the house a little bit. They've been back home 15 years now.

NL: Wow, look at that. What exactly did you do after Fordham and how did you progress to move out of the Bronx?

PD: When I got my degree, I was able to get my first job out of college at Philip Morris, the cigarette company. I was employed there for two years and every six months I worked in a different department. I had really wanted to be a lawyer, but I didn't know how. I didn't know who to ask. I didn't have anybody in my family circle who could direct me. And because I didn't spend a lot of time in school I didn't know to talk to Fordham Law School, go figure. Or talk to my professors and say how do I go to law school. So I took the first job out of college only because at that time it was not easy for African American women or women at the time to get a job, not that it's easy now. It was very competitive back in 1981 when I got my first job, so I took it. I was making \$12,500, which was more than my dad was making. I can home with the offer and I said to my mother 'I got a job at Philip Morris. What should I do?' and she said 'Take the job.' She never said ask somebody. She never said try to get other companies. She said take

the job. So I took the job and stayed at Philip Morris for 10 years. While I was there, I got promoted, did the right thing, and that's how I got into technology because in the early 90s that's when Corporate America started to replace manual systems with technology solutions. When I was your age there were not computers on every desk, they were as big as this room. The work that we had to do was all manual. I was an accountant back then so it was all manual labor.

NL: Where you still living at home at the time when you were working?

PD: Yes. I didn't leave the house until I got married.

MN: And that was --

PD: In 1985.

MN: Now --

PD: Actually, we stayed a year because we were saving up to buy a house. We lived in the basement.

MN: Now were you an accounting major at Fordham?

PD: I was economics and a minor in accounting. So you take the first job you get. It was accounting. Six months I did controller work and six months I did, I think it was international treasury. Then six months I did sales. Six months -- they try to give you exposure over a two-year period. After the two years if you like the company and they like you and there's an opening, you stay. So after the two years, they stayed in a department called international reporting and my role was to, not physically count cigarettes, but to do the cigarette accounting. How much money are we making in Saudi Arabia and Turkey and these countries? I'd do that and after a while I became the key person on the team to create the report for management to look at and see if it's profitable in Saudi Arabia or wherever. That was the same time that the



firm purchased a technology solution to replace this manual processes. So the team of technology people that they had as consultants needed to have an end user on the team to help them convert manual and that was me. That is where I got my first introduction to technology and I stayed there for 10 years.

MN: Was the training for these adaptations something that Fordham taught you or was it more from your own experience?

PD: Survival.

MN: Survival.

PD: You know I can't think of one thing that I learned that I use.

[laughter]

PD: It the truth, but having Fordham on your resume is not the worst thing in the world.

NL: No its not.

PD: Its access.

MN: It opens the door, but once you're in you have to figure it out yourself.

PD: Figure it out yourself, yes.

NL: When you and your husband got married, did you move somewhere else in the Bronx or did you live somewhere else.

PD: Our hope was to -- we were planning to live in Westchester because we didn't want to live in the Bronx, or Long Island where he was from in Hempstead. So we started looking for houses. Somewhere along the way, I was fortunate enough to be given a job opportunity to work at Merrill Lynch in Plainfield, New Jersey. No, I had never lived in New Jersey. I didn't know

anyone who lived there. All I did was go through it. I hated New Jersey because it just didn't look like a place where anybody should live.

[laughter]

NL: That's what most New Yorkers think, its ok.

PD: It wasn't my place. I was offered the job on the spot when I went for the interview back in 1996. So we had to move to New Jersey. The first house we bought was in Plainfield, New Jersey.

MN: Which is which part of New Jersey?

PD: It's ten miles North of Princeton, so it Southern New Jersey. So that's how we got out of the house. We had no plans to move to New Jersey. We had plans to buy a house. Seven years later, after our marriage we had our first daughter.

NL: How many children do you have?

PD: Two the last count and that will be the only count.

NL: [laughter] Two the last count. Ok. I was going to ask are your children in private schools, Catholic school?

PD: No, public school. New Jersey has one of the best public school systems in the country. At the height of taxes, they are going to go to public school.

MN: Are you still living in the same community that --

PD: Generally speaking, when we first moved in we were living in a town called Dayton. Plains borough was the next town, which was where the company was located. We stayed in that house for about 10 years or so. It was a town house, but it was the house that we bought. Then we upgraded. We bought some property and built a bigger house, which is in the same

neighborhood, maybe three or four miles away. We stayed there for eight years. Three months ago, meaning last year, we bought a nice, big property and now we live there. The school system is why we like it. South Brunswick has a good school system.

NL: With your children, do you raise them to have a Dominican identity or a West Indian identity since both of you are?

PD: Yes. Yes. My son loves Sparrow. He loves Bob Marley. We won't let them forget where they came from. They love the food, the music, the dance, everything.

NL: Did they go back and forth to Dominica?

PD: I took them twice. We have taken them back to Grenada, but I have taken them to Dominica twice. My daughter is like when are we going back again. They love it because they are free.

And my kids are nature freaks.

NL: Right, Dominica has so much beautiful, natural vegetation. It's gorgeous. I think it's interesting that you have such a remarkable history. It's so different from what we have seen. I was wondering if over the course of your life if you felt like you were deprived of anything having been so sheltered?

PD: No. Its, you know, -- now as an adult female I wish I had friends. Because they say, women have friends longer than men. From high school, from grade school, from elementary school. I didn't have play dates. I didn't have -- there are probably two people in my life that if I go back in my education, in my academic years, Kim DiRossario. I would say as a friend. We have kept in touch the longest. Wendy Schilling, who never went to school with me, but she was one of the first people I met when I got to Philip Morris. We keep in touch literally year after year. She lived not too far from me. There is another person that I know that we don't keep in touch but if I

saw her it would be just like yesterday, Michelle Anchesabo, who went to Fordham with me as well. That's it out of the thousand people that I have met in my life. I'm trying to create friendships on my current job. I've been at CitiGroup -- I'm in my tenth year and there are three women that I have gelled with very nicely. We carpool together. They are from Jamaica. One of them is from Asia and just, you get to know people. I invite them to my house now and it seems nice. We share the same values, that sort of thing, but I don't have thousands of people. You say who are your friends. I can count them on one hand. I can fit them all in this room and still have space for more. I take that friendship title very seriously. I have a lot of people that I know but I wouldn't invite them to my house.

NL: You wouldn't call them friends.

PD: No, I wouldn't call them friends.

NL: I was going to ask are you still very close knit with your family or are you all spread out?

PD: Yes. Crazy. I become the one in my family; I don't want to say the voice of reason, but the one that centers everybody. If my sister has an issue or need some advice, call Pat. Or if my brother, call Pat. I've become the one, so by default I'm the one that's kept in touch with.

NL: Sure. And are there any family members that still live in the Bronx?

PD: My sister Cookie bought my parents' house when they moved to Dominica. She moved out and moved to Florida a few years later. So the answer is, do we have anyone left in the Bronx?

No, but my mother has a sister in St. Albans, Queens. I still have a few cousins, who are not in the Bronx, but who moved out to Dutchess County.

MN: So of that whole group of Dominicans on Tremont Avenue has moved on?

PD: Yes. My father's brother -- so my father's generation has moved back to Dominica or Florida. Their children have spread out to other parts of New York or New Jersey. So the first generation is gone out of New York. They didn't like the cold weather.

MN: So this seems like a classic immigrant success story.

PD: I think so. My parents came here with nothing. We came here with nothing.

MN: How would you see your experience as different than an Italian American whose family came here with nothing and ended up in Central New Jersey working for Merrill Lynch or CitiGroup?

PD: I can tell you, and this may be stereotypical, I view other immigrants outside of the West Indian community, the families build something. A bakery. They bought a gas station. They are leaving a legacy with their children. They have a business. We don't have a business. And maybe those groups do more with their hands. They have more skill. What's the skill in the Caribbean? A farmer, in most cases. To me, I think that's the big difference.

MN: That's interesting. Your family tried to create businesses.

PD: We're not business people is my point.

[laughter]

PD: That's not what we do. That's not what we are good at. At least not my family.

MN: Are there any particular careers -- some West Indians gravitate to health care.

PD: There are a lot of nurses in my mother's age group. Not registered nurses but more like nurse's aids.

NL: West Indian women dominate in the nursing home and home care and nannies.

PD: The men, its all blue-collar workers. There is not one businessperson amongst them, not it that age group. In my age group, -- my generation is more either Wall Street, academia, pharmaceuticals --

NL: So they really out did the old generation?

PD: Yes and that was the hope. The hope was that everyone in the next group, of the previous group. So, so far so good. There are a bunch of PhDs in there.

NL: Wow. That is something. I was going to ask you about your experience at CitiGroup now because I understand from Damien [McCreath] that you're the Global Head of Diversity. How did that happen and what do you think is -- because obviously you are dealing with issues of race now in the work place all the time -- what is your take on all that?

PD: The way I got the job was -- I've been at CitiGroup for ten years -- five years ago, I was the chief of staff for the CIO and one of the things he had asked all of his managers at the time 'What else do I do for the firm? What else would you like to do as a job?' and I knew I didn't want to be in technology any longer because I had been doing it for twenty something years on Wall Street and I wasn't excited about it anymore about installing new systems and building applications. It didn't get me all excited, but what excited me about all my previous jobs was influencing people and having the ability to be the voice of people of didn't have a voice. So five years ago I said 'I think I might want to be the Head of Diversity. I think I might want to be the Head of Communications or I want to have a job that has an impact on people.' That's what I said to him, knowing that neither one of those three was a part of his world. Three months after I said that, the Head of Diversity for our firm resigned. I had gotten calls from many senior

managers saying 'I hear you want to be the Head of Diversity. We'd like you to take this job.'

That's how I got the job.

MN: Are their pressures on you from particular constituencies in terms of diversity. Do you have any groups who are organized by their cohort that are coming to you saying 'We want our folks to have a piece'?

PD: Not in a way that I would call pressure. I've developed through technology -- when you work in technology as long as I did you -- everything to me is a technology problem. When you build technology systems, you have to have a beginning, middle and end. You have to have a project plan, you have to have a credit standing as if 'Ok. If I build this how would it be better?' And that's how I look at diversity. It's a business problem that I'm not going to solve in my lifetime on Wall Street. My hope is that while I'm here it will be better than it was yesterday. That's all I can hope for. So what I do is I say let me get more people than me to help solve the problem because the problem is changing. The work force is changing. The community is changing. The fact that our company has employees outside of this is a fact and it's changing. So diversity, when I first started five years ago, was different than now. It's different than when I first started CitiGroup ten years ago. So I said let me create a process of how we as a firm can make this place environmentally better for anybody and make it a company of inclusiveness -- whatever the hell that means. Because I am a Global function, so its not minorities in Asia, its women in Asia. Its not African Americans in London its cultural differences in Europe. We work with Italians, we work with French, and we work with Polish people. The diversity changes as you go in the world. I don't get pressure in the way where the NAACP is knocking on my door and say 'Hey, how come you don't have senior women in the C suite?' We create our own

internal pressure meaning what do we want to put as markers to be better. So we create diversity operating committees within each core business and it's staffed with senior businesspeople that have a virtual -- they are like my virtual team. We also create affinity groups, so you might have an African American affinity group of employees who say 'We want to band together so that we know there are more of us here.' CitiGroup is in so many buildings and so many places that you can't see all of us at once. We have affinity groups for the gay and lesbian community, we have for parents, we have it for people with disabilities, and we have it for Asians and so on. What we do is let them know how they can help the firm employ more people like them. If they feel good about the place, how they can band together to show others that this is a place for them. That's how we the [unintelligible] So I don't get pressure in the way that maybe a non-profit will knock on our door. We create our own internal pressure and it's controlled. That's how I would site it.

NL: Do you have any final thoughts on your experiences in the Bronx? Whether or not you felt like you benefited from being here?

PD: It's funny because I think about it all the time. When I took my kids -- they are fortunate right. They have their own bedroom. They have a two-car garage. They don't have a house where they can hear the toilet from the neighbor flushing.

[laughter]

PD: When they sleep at night, there is no noise. They can hear a pin drop. There are trees in the neighborhood. They have their freedom, but they are not street smart. So one day I took my kids to the South Bronx and my son was pointing at something and said 'What's that?' He had never seen graffiti before. He was asking 'How come the windows are broken in here? How come the cars don't have the same four-color doors? What are all those people sitting on the stoop for?'



How come the kids are playing basketball without a net? Why are they playing baseball? Why don't they have a park?' So, in a way, I'm fortunate as much as I have to day I know where I came from. I keep my kids grounded. I don't want my kids to be greedy because even though we can afford things, I'll tell them 'No, we can't afford them.' I want them to realize. I want them to be givers. I want them to go through their closet and give stuff they don't need or they need, but someone else can use more. I make sure they volunteer and understand that not everybody has a lifestyle like us. They need to know that and sometimes you can get confused in the neighborhoods that I live in. I want them to understand who we are and how we got here and they shouldn't just take it for granted. I don't think that if I didn't have that boundary -- you know Wall Street creates doubles to some extent. People get consumed -- it's like prostitution basically -- with the money that you make and the abilities that you have and it creates some sort of a play system sometimes.

MN: My daughter works at Goldman Sachs and makes five times what I do.

PD: That's the biggest prostitution in the country.

[laughter]

PD: You know what I mean.

MN: I know exactly what you mean.

PD: My plan was not to work on Wall Street. It was to make sure I didn't have any debt and that I was healthy. That I had a good family and my kids loved me and I was a good mom and a wife and a family member. Then you get onto Wall Street and like 'Holy shit! This is crazy.' We have things that the average person doesn't have. My son thinks that every person has a microwave in their house and that everybody has a CD player and a DVD player. I'm like 'No. We have things

that most people maybe don't have so don't assume that you have a life like everybody else.'

You have to keep them grounded. But I don't think if I didn't grow up in the Bronx that I would feel that way. I'm very fortunate for what I have because I'm not supposed to be here.

NL: Yes. Your story is supposed to turn out very differently.

PD: Too many things could have happened along the way, but the family nucleus was what kept us together. And the fact that we didn't stray because we were kept maybe close to the home there were very few outlets to get lost. We're not dead. We're not in jail. Nobody is on drugs, I mean for the amount of people that we are life is pretty good.

NL: This was wonderful. Thank you so much.

MN: This was wonderful. Thank you so much.

PD: Did you get what you wanted?

NL: Of course, we got a great story.

[END OF INTERVIEW]