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Interviewee: Shirley Fearon

Interviewer: Brian Purnell

Date: May 15, 2007

Williamsbridge NAACP Office

Brian Purnell (BP): If we could please start by you saying and spelling your first and last name.

Shirley Fearon (SF): Shirley Fearon (spells name)

BP: What is your date of birth Ms. Fearon?

SF: July 8, 1945

BP: Where were you born?

SF: New York City. I was actually born in Harlem Hospital. But I was raised, my very early years in the South Bronx, Brook Avenue.

BP: If we could begin by speaking about your biography a bit. Did your parents live in Harlem first and then move to the Bronx?

SF: My mom was born in Harlem. My father came from Anderson, Alabama. His father knew my grandfather and so when my father came to New York City he was instructed to look for my grandfather, which he did. And then he found a wife by so looking. Yes so my father is from Anderson, Alabama, my grandfather is from Anderson, Alabama, my grandmother is from Fayetteville, North Carolina. They moved to Harlem, they came to New York and lived in Harlem.

BP: Why did they move to the Bronx?

SF: Well, Harlem was Harlem and they were poor. My grandmother had six kids. She had four and then after a long period of time she had twins. Matter of fact she nearly died having these twins. When she had the twins my grandfather sort of came to life. And he got, not only did he get a job, but he got two jobs. He got one with he went to the New York Telephone Company lied because they had age restriction. So they put they down a few years of their age and they both got jobs he got a job at the telephone company, they both worked at the telephone company cleaning, and my grandfather also got a job at Loews Victorian in Harlem on the door in the evenings because he was determined to move his family out of Harlem. And they came up in 1948, 219th street and 800 block we were 680 and they moved to 869 they were the second black family on the block.

BP: So they moved up into the northeast Bronx in 1948?

SF: Yes.

SF: With all the good white folks. Nothing but Italians. Italians and matter fact there was a guy who had a barbershop on the corner he went around with a petition that no more colored people would move into the block. 1948.

BP: When they first arrived?

SF: Yes. When they first arrived. Because that was the second family and they were like no, not happening.

BP: Was there a stop in the South Bronx, on Brook Avenue you said first?

SF: No, Brook Avenue is where I lived with my parents. This is my grandparents and I was raised pretty much with my mom and my grandparents.

BP: And what types of-- I guess we could speak a little bit about their experience in the northeast Bronx in the 1940's. Was it just that petition that people passed around or was there any other--

SF: That is all that I was aware of I was a little girl then so you know I came up. I guess we came up I was in kindergarten so that was in 1950 and that was 1950 when I first came. And that is really all I was ever told about was the petition.

BP: So your parents lived on Brook Avenue, you grew up on Brook Avenue?

SF: Yes, we were on Brook Avenue for a little while and then my parents broke up and that is when I came 1950, my mother and I we lived up with my grandfather and my grandmother.

BP: In Williamsbridge?

SF: Yes.

BP: So what type of work did your parents do?

SF: Neither one of them are college educated. As a matter of fact my mother had some issues she had emotional issues when she was little and they had put her in a mental hospital I guess. She had a nervous breakdown when the Lindberg baby was kidnapped.

BP: When was that?

SF: 1929 or 32 somewhere in there. The Lindberg baby when I know it is a little bit before your time it's before my time.

[Laughter]

Lindberg was the one that flew the airplanes. The child or something was kidnapped. I guess it was a little too much information for my mother who was still a kid. And who was little. And so she finished, she went to school but she never finished high school. I

guess she got to high school I cant really say. My father he never finished high school. She just you know had more issues just getting along with people and being able to cope.

BP: Do you have any siblings?

SF: My father has a son. I have a brother. He had some learning disability issues. He's actually in a rehab place now so I get up there to see him all the time.

BP: So what was your experience like growing up? I guess you spent your childhood up here in Williamsbridge? What was this neighborhood like in the 1950's, the early 1950's?

SF: Like I said it was mostly Italian but you know kids are kids. Kids are good. I had my little friends I do remember that on 218th street one of my friends, one of my good friends she lived in a private house, two family. But I couldn't like come inside the gate. She wasn't the owner of the house and the owners didn't want you know any colored children or whatever they call us. We would play outside you know we would play jump rope.

And some of the other kids would come over. But that I remember. Yes stuff like that.

The kids were alright I never felt, I never felt, I always felt alright I think I remember learning about slaves and feeling a little you know. But I did alright and they were alright and that is good for me I've never been intimidated. Whereas I've run into some people and I used to work with a guy and he said oh you say anything I said well I that's because I was always comfortable with white people. But you know I cant say I had a whole lot of issues with being discriminated against. I do remember we were all going to the park and some kids was calling us niggers. Down the street there, down by the Bronx River Parkway. But we didn't really have a whole lot you know you have black kids who had come up from Harlem. Not a whole lot. But we had enough to hang out with and you know we went to Evander and Evander was an excellent school then. Lord knows it was

an excellent school. I don't know what it is now. I do remember that one time and any time I ran into guys who went to Clinton, they went to Clinton High School, I always mess with them because we were in high school we were fifteen, 1960, and we were boosters, my girlfriend. We were boosters for the football team and Clinton was coming to play us this particular Friday and at the game Clinton beat us 20-0. Evander Tigers beat us 20-0 and then proceeded to start a riot after the game, with the bats the whole nine. And we, my girlfriend and I got out of there pronto. So the next morning I come upstairs to the breakfast and my grandfather says, so you weren't going to tell us about the game? You know not telling him is like almost lying, not only that but you definitely weren't going to tell him then they wouldn't let me go to anymore football games. Lord have mercy it was on the front page of the Daily News, Gridiron Gang I cant remember, but I remember Gridiron, Grid Game or something and the whole article was about that it was, they pretty much said it was a race riot. They said that the students in Evander, that is why I know not to trust the newspaper too much, the students in Evander was 95% black and it was 95% white in Clinton. That is what the newspaper said I'll never forget it. Like I said that's why you know I read the papers but you cant necessarily trust what they say because they just absolutely do not know what they are talking about because it was no more than 5% black in either of the schools.

BP: Wow.

SF: No more. So they had their 95% 's little bit backwards and made it into a race riot. Lord have mercy. Nothing but white kids. And it wasn't even like the white kids were trying to bother the black kids because it was nothing but white kids.

BP: Did your grandparents, did your grandfather own a home?

SF: We owned a house yes. He went to a lot of his friends and borrowed money so that he could buy the house.

BP: And I guess growing up there was another black family in--

SF: Oh yeah, and you know and like I said one of my best girlfriends lived around the corner and then there was another black family. Especially by the time we got done with high school because in the-- We went to high school in 60 so I actually did one of them demographic surveys report when I was taking sociology but of course that was a long time ago so--

[Laughs]

But I what I did I chronicled the number of blacks in the area.

BP: Oh really, do you still have that?

SF: No, I graduated from college in 1970 so, no I don't have that. But that was what, it's information you could find. But I chronicled that because what it was, was they were starting you know, maybe you don't know but you see where all these new houses are everything is relatively thirty or forty years you know. The brick houses and they just kept building houses, these attached houses all over the place. Attached houses everywhere. And the blacks were moving into them because they were advertising down in Harlem because people you know got jobs and they were working and they could afford to buy the houses. Larry Warden who was our former city councilman in the 90's he was our city councilman he told me his family realtor, they were buying another house or something like that and the realtor got them to move on my block because they were building these houses on my block, my house I been there 35 years. My house is about

fifty years old. And they were building and they were trying to get the blacks to come up and they had his family move into the house and they stayed in there a few months to run some of the white people away. This way you sell the house and make more money get black folks up in there. It's these are the things that were done of course you know the white flight is something.

BP: Yes I was going to ask about that. Two questions, did you grow up going to church, attending a particular church?

SF: St. Luke's, I was going to mention that. St. Luke's is 100 years old I think. You mentioned New Bedford that's all part of that church.

BP: That's right here on--

SF: 222nd St.

BP: So in the 1950's I guess was that church predominately African American?

SF: Yes. It was blacks. It was Caribbeans.

BP: So even at that time, in the 50's, there was a population of West Indians in this neighborhood going back that far?

SF: Yes.

BP: Relationships between African Americans and blacks from the Caribbean were they harmonious?

SF: I never had any trouble with anybody. And I was raised in that church.

BP: Did you notice the moving away of white people in the neighborhood, is that something you saw over time?

SF: Yes it was something you can't help. You got fewer white kids in class.

BP: So that is how you saw it, through your classes?

SF: Yes.

BP: Maybe we could talk about--

[Pause]

BP: Where did you attend school? Where did you go to elementary and middle school?

SF: Right here at 113. Right here on 216th St. and Barnes Avenue. It was mixed in. One time, was I in 7th grade? They had two schools P.S. 78 went from kindergarten to 8th grade and then they cut off the top two grades. So those kids were coming over here that's like closer to Boston Rd. there were a lot of Jews over there that was really my first, other than teachers that was the first experience with Jewish kids. Because they were over in Hillside towards Boston Rd. there were a lot of Jews.

BP: In school what were your experiences like with teachers? Did you have positive experiences in school?

SF: Oh yes, I always loved school. I had a fifth grade teacher that took us on trips all the time. But I've never had any bad issues.

BP: What was your family's approach toward education? Was it something that was stressed in your home?

SF: My grandparents didn't of course. And my mom didn't. What my grandmother her father my grandmother's mother died when she was three years old. Which would be my great grandmother. So my great grandfather got married again and had another set of kids, he had like 12 kids, six and six something like that. And so the younger ones were more educated, they were educated, college degrees and everything and matter of fact that was a little resentment on the parts of my aunts. And so of course I'm going to go to

school, my grandfather told me that, when I was in high school because, see I was really like poorer than a lot of the other kids. And so I was really associating with a lot of kids that were just of better, they got more money. And it was sure that they were going to college. In high school I was always in an academic program, so everybody is going to college. So even though I didn't know how I was going get to college, my mother sure didn't have any money and my father anytime he came down to visit he didn't have any. And my grandparents you know they struggled to keep things going, I don't know that they were retired yet. But they were retiring somewhere in that time so it was always intent in my head to go to college but I didn't know how it was going to get paid but that was because I would have to say because of the neighbors, the friends. But my grandfather said because I was intent, I knew I didn't have money, so when I graduated high school I got a job at Citibank, the First National Citibank, and I got the job because I figured I was going to save all my money and I told my grandfather I'm going to save my money so I can go to college in February. Which is what I did. I applied to Long Island University. Zeckendorf campus out there in Brooklyn.

BP: What is the name of the campus?

SF: Zeckendorf. Its over there on 11th St.

BP: Flatbush.

SF: I paid the first 600 dollars. That's a lot of money in 1963. 64 a lot of money. So I paid it. He paid the next semester for me. So I got a whole year there. And after that I didn't have no money. So I came to Hunter. And I had to take more credits because you had I think I had like a C average you 2 point something. It wasn't a B. So then I was able to go to Hunter at night, somewhere in there I got married. Then I went back. By the

time I went back I had like two years of college courses but even still I worked. I worked full time and went to school in the evening.

BP: Were you still working at Citibank?

SF: No, I had various little jobs. Somewhere in there I just stopped working finished up the last phase of that.

BP: I have a question that, I'm writing an article, my specific research is on the civil rights movement in New York City in the 1960's and I'm researching these demonstrations that took place in the Bronx in 1963 around White Castle.

SF: I don't know anything about that. I remember I was about 12 or 13, so lets say '45,'55,'57,'58, no it was later than that. Because they didn't start the branch until '58 so the branch was relatively new, so he was involved with some of the people. The new president of this branch.

BP: Who was this?

SF: My grandfather.

BP: What was his name?

SF: Ross Woodson. He wasn't like any officer but he come over to NACP (NAACP) you know and talk about Mr. Burnett and stuff like that. But I remember they did have us picketing. I was so embarrassed, oh my god. I was like I might've been fourteen or so, I don't know if I was in high school. But it was probably not too long after that. We started in '58. They were picketing because they said they didn't hire black people.

BP: Where was this?

SF: This was the five and dime on White Plains Rd. 216th St. It was, well they had two, they had Presky's I don't know which one it was. But it was a five and ten.

BP: And there were demonstrations there?

SF: Yes, we were demonstrating because they didn't hire black people.

BP: As a teenager you felt embarrassed?

SF: Oh my God I was afraid someone was going to see me. You kidding? Like I said I must have been at least thirteen, fourteen because they started in '58 and the branch was in. So I must've been like fourteen or fifteen and I was like afraid someone was going to see me. Now I get out there on Fifth Avenue with Sean Bell.

BP: Right. [Laughs]

SF: Right down there on Fifth Avenue.

BP: Can we speak a little bit about the environment in your home. Was your grandfather a political minded or a politically active person? Did he discuss politics?

SF: Like I said he had two jobs. They would discuss the climates. I was never particularly familiar with who was running in the office or anything. But like I said he did come up with the NACP (NAACP) and had us out picketing. He was from the south so they know the NACP (NAACP). But he wasn't seriously, but I --

[Interruption]

BP: Political conversations were not part of the evening?

SF: I might not necessarily remember. Like I said he worked a lot so I mean I don't remember a whole lot of political conversation. I knew he was in awareness of stuff. Yea.

BP: So I guess we usually ask that question is how did you become interested in--

SF: I don't know I always wanted to. Maybe through college. But when my kids were growing up I said I'm going to get involved with them you know politically. I'm going to get involved. I think once my daughter. You know what happened was once my husband and I separated when my daughter was nine, my son was 14 you know I fixed dinner all the time. One Sunday my daughter was about fifteen and my son I guess 20 and I fixed dinner on a Sunday and there was no one home eating the dinner but me. Big old roast chicken and everything so I said you know these kids are doing their own thing you know you have your eye on them and everything but I have to get involved. I don't know why I had this need I can say I just can't think of anything in particular that spurred me that way. But I was I have got to get involved I have got to get involved and then it wasn't until in '88 my girlfriend was going to NACP (NAACP) meetings she always wanted me to come to the meetings so I said okay and I came to the meeting.

BP: What year was this?

SF: This was in '88. And I liked the way Al Tuitt ran the grant. You know the meeting was very businesslike it wasn't no okey doke stuff it was very businesslike and I said I like this and at that meeting they had the school superintendent there. And I said well this is very interesting so I started coming to the meetings and then I got involved with the political club. Larry Seabrooke was married to a long time friend of mine from elementary school remember I told you there wasn't too many of us so you know you got one in this class and one in that class and one in the other class and so I know Lavern since we were you know in elementary school. So her husband you know, I joined the club I guess he was an assemblyman then.

BP: The club was?

SF: Our democratic club. Our democratic club.

BP: What is the name of that?

SF: Northeast Bronx Community Democratic Club.

BP: Is that organization predominantly African American?

SF: Yes.

BP: I'll come back to the NAACP. I did want to speak a bit about how you became a teacher. Were you a teacher?

SF: How that came about like I said I was raised in the academic program and I really wanted to go to college and but I wanted to be when I was like fifteen or sixteen I wanted to be a pediatrician. I guess I always had a people thing. But I wanted to be a pediatrician since I couldn't figure out how I was going to go to college and then also I figured out I wasn't like liking science too much. [Laughs] How you going to be a doctor you don't even like science you need to find something else.

BP: What subjects did you like in school since you were--

SF: I've always liked history, English I always did good in. I would say that type of stuff. Science I was just like inept to. I don't know that I had enough exposure. Whereas with my kids I took them to museums I took them everywhere. They had a million books so I guess its stuff from childhood that makes you do things differently as an adult. So anyway I had my son, I got married and had my son and then I went back to college. At that stage--

BP: To Hunter?

SF: Yes. I went back to Hunter. Back to Hunter. At that stage I was interested in sociology. So in Hunter I think I started with sociology when I started LIU. But then when I got to Hunter somewhere in there after I had my son I figured teaching would be good. So in Hunter you had to have your major, so I majored in sociology and I took elementary education which was 130 credits because the courses weren't all that challenging you just had to do the work they wouldn't let you major in education. That's how I got to education. Like I said I went from wanting to be a pediatrician to wanting to be a social worker to being a teacher so it always had to do with people.

BP: Where did you teach? Did you teach in the Bronx?

SF: I taught in the Bronx. I started out in 1970 in the Walton Ave. 170th St. P.S. 64. There were a lot of white folks down there too. One little kid sent me some little nasty note.

BP: When you first started?

SF: Something about nigger, I don't even remember. Black something I can't remember.

BP: When you first started teaching?

SF: Yes. I was a sub. I taught everyday but they called them regular subs.

BP: You kind of went to the different classrooms?

SF: Right.

BP: The teacher was not present?

SF: Right. Either that or doing preps with them. But that was 170th St. there were still white folks down there too. Still white folks up on the Concourse, but that was in the '70's. That was 1970.

BP: What did you do when you got that note?

SF: I didn't pay it any mind. I just kept right on stepping. I think by the time I got the note was really after I had left the class. I kind of figured who wrote the note because he didn't seem to like me and but I didn't tell anybody I just didn't pay it any mind. Right on rolling. But I taught down, I lost my license and so because I was supposed to have student teaching and have two different types of tests. So anyway I got back to school after I had my daughter I got back to work after I had my daughter and my teaching was primarily up in this area. Yes I taught emotionally handicapped, they called me to sub one day at P.S. 103 that's on 230th St. right off the highway. They called me to sub one day and I worked with there were like seven kids in the class and I just really liked working with them. They were liking me and liking attention and so I did that. I taught learning disabled for a couple years I didn't like that because I though I'd give myself a heart attack. Because with learning disabled children they're supposedly of average intelligence they are just having trouble getting things. I had learning disabled class and but if you really work with them you had to show them that they could do it. That was the first part of the job, just showing them that they can do it. Talking and explaining and we did very well. Both years they went up like two years in reading but I just felt I'm killing myself working with these kids. And I was getting a little older so I started, the last eleven years I worked as an educational evaluator. I assess children for special education services I work with a social worker and psychologist. That was a great job because at first I thought I wouldn't be as important and as needed but that was extremely important you would have the conference with the parents and just give them teaching strategies, how to work with their children.

BP: You worked in the department of education or the Board of Education from 1970 through?

SF: Yes, I was off a few years and I retired in 2003.

BP: So this job you did as an educational evaluator--

SF: Educational evaluator, yes I did that for the last eleven years that is all Department of Education.

BP: This thirty plus odd years--

SF: I had about 28 because I was out a few we had layoffs, we had all kinds of stuff going on.

BP: During these thirty years and even having gone to schools in the Bronx how would you describe the ways that the schools changed?

SF: Well.

BP: Did the schools change?

SF: You had more and more black folks moving up. You had more and more poor folks moving up. So you're dealing with a different group of people than when I was in school. You had drugs, played a very very important part. But some of my kids they problem was because of their families. They had issues and if someone was helping them. I had friends of mine, longtime friends, the one's I told you that he took care of his granddaughter they had two daughters, the mother's college degree she was a physical therapist and the father he didn't go to college. So anyway the two daughters one was very bright and one was mediocre. The other one was an A student and but the one that was an A student she just had trouble getting along with folks and when all the kids was there somewhere in there she'd be screaming and the other daughter when she started school she couldn't

understand because the sister everything was fast and she was having trouble learning stuff. But the mother knew when I worked with Shareea, we would start Mondays to do this and on Tuesday we do this, lets say Social Studies, one two three chapters then on Thursday I'd give her a test and so Shareea graduated high school on time. Now in the wrong family she would have probably been in special education, for sure. And Sean going off the, I'm telling you at a big family something, Sean would be screaming and yelling hysterically.

BP: This is the A student?

SF: This is the A student. And she would've been in the emotionally handicapped class, I know this. But the fact that the father, he worked in the bar at night so he would receive the kids when they came in from school and they would change their clothes and have a little snack. A little routine and he was very calm, he was calm very cool and so that's what I'm saying. They were from the family that nourished them and they were fine but with the wrong family they both were special education, I have no doubt in it. And that is what has happened over the years. You got people who don't finish school who don't want to listen to the teacher and they end up all messed up and then their kids come out worse.

BP: When did you notice drugs affecting this neighborhood?

SF: Well when we got out of high school down in the valley you really had a lot of that. People with a few more dollars, they got the new houses and--

BP: Where is the valley?

SF: On the other side of Boston Rd., back there Gunther Ave.. We called it valley because they were new houses and if you go over there, there were only a few houses it was like you go down a hill like, so we called it the valley. They still call it the valley. When we got out of high school some of the guys, really came from nice families down in the valley, all went on heroin. We were like in shock. We were going to college and doing our thing and they were all smart and it was like a whole string of them they were all friends.

BP: This was in the early sixties?

SF: Yes. I graduated '63 so I'd say '64, '65. So that was when I became acutely aware of heroin. My girlfriend's brother, my girlfriend was raised in Edenwald Projects and one of her brothers got on. I don't know why, you know it's the same family its four kids, he was on heroin, and at that time I was already married and stuff. Maybe '70. '70, '71 I remember going to the laundromat over there and I saw Barry. You know how they would do.

BP: Nodding.

SF: Yeah that whole nod like, you look like you they are going to fall on the floor, on the ground. So that's when I became aware of drugs.

BP: Early sixties?

SF: Yes.

BP: Did young men, did the Vietnam War, did you see an impact of that in the community at all in the sixties?

SF: You know we had people being drafted, my son I had a son thank god that kept my husband out of the draft. My husband took twelve credits in college before we got married so he had to work because his loved ones they didn't have any money they come from the South Bronx they didn't have money. But he was going to Bronx Community College so he went to college and he worked full time but he took twelve credits, keep him out of the draft. When we had Brian then you know that kept him out of the draft. But yes, the service you know, people getting drafted, if you weren't in college full time. One of my good friends brother got cut down parachuting out of the plane. It was so sad I was ready to have my son then. You were hearing about this one and that one getting killed and a war just like this one. We had no business over there.

BP: I wanted to ask if we could speak a little bit about your participation in the branch as well as the Northeast Bronx Democratic Club. So you became involved in the late 1980's you said right?

SF: Yes.

BP: How would you describe Al Tuitt? Who was he?

SF: They were trying to name a school after him? We haven't even investigated because I've been so busy, they are going to change the name to Sports Academy or something so they took his name off of it. He's so mad because he died two years ago. Al lived up on 230th St. and their kids went to school above 233rd St. Now north of 233rd St. you really had a lot of white folks. I remember when my son, my son is 41 now, so this was '66, '67 and I was going the stroller with carriage. I always liked to walk and I lived on 227th St.. I was strolling one day and I went above 233rd St. and the little boy was so nice. A little white boy he was saying hello because he seen me with the baby and I said I'm getting up

here with the white folks I better get back down here. Al Tuitt lived on 230th St. and his kids went to school above 233rd St.. He was the type of person, because their kids were bussed and he was the type of person that, wonderful salesman so he had the personality for everything, he became the president of the parent's association at P.S. 87 and that school was white for a long time, but that is the type of person he was. He used to get along with everybody and everybody and used to get things done. And they had the community newspaper.

[Baby Crying]

He would get things done he was a good role model, he was the president before me. He was definitely the good guy. He had a political group also. And they would do voter registration, that's so important getting people to vote, because kids in Africa they don't want to vote. We fight them down now because a lot of West Indians, I'm not from here, I'm going home. When you going home? How long you been here? Fifteen minutes.

[Laughter]

I remember one time, because when I'm out there, I like doing street work on a Saturday. I don't do it too often now. You're working with people again, trying to get them to think your way. The West Indians a lot are like that because they are going back to Jamaica or wherever and they don't want to be there they don't want to vote. How you going to tell me you been here for twenty years and you don't want to vote, are you for real?

BP: Is that one of the main works the branch is involved in, voter registration?

SF: Yes. We got our candidates form and we always have our candidates form in September.

[Interruption]

BP: So I was asking about some of the activities of the branch when you first joined in the '80's.

SF: Like I said, I didn't even at my meeting last night, because we usually get out and do some voter registration in like July. Nice weather get out by the post office. So we always do voter registration, sometimes we'd have a big get out to vote rally just to spur people up and have some political figures there. We had to do things with it raw because otherwise they don't hear you. September we always have our candidates form, whoever is running we would invite them over.

BP: And does the branch meet out of this facility?

SF: Yes. We meet out of this facility. Downstairs in that auditorium there, people still have stuff in. It look much better now, I'm sure the last time you were here it was much more loaded up.

BP: How many members would you say, have there been since you first joined?

SF: We usually maintain about four hundred or so a year, we have less than five hundred which is one my goals, to get it back up to one thousand. When we first started we had a thousand members. But you know people don't think it is useful, they don't want to be called colored they don't know the difference it makes. Well they changed the name! Well why don't you just try to do some work for the community, and don't get involved with those dumb junk. But you know that is how people are, but we try to bring information to people. One of the things that mandates is health so we have a health fair June 23rd. We got the committee's going to advertise in different places, the younger ones will get out there on the street and drag the people into the health fair. Free refreshments, you know

because we have people from Our Lady of Mercy that do some blood work. People bring information on asthma and cancer and everything. That's is very important even in intelligent people, its just so hard to fathom it, I don't know you may be one of them too that don't go to doctors, that don't get checkups, I have a friend that just visited I don't know what she's planning to do, she had this big old tumor. And I said well how come the doctor didn't notice it? Well she don't go to the doctor, oh well that's a good reason. So we try to bring information to people, we'll have the health fair but then at the meeting we will have someone talk about diabetes. My first vice-president just came down from being president of the National Council of Negro Women.

BP: What is her name?

SF: Laura Rodan. They had some type of training, they took this course on diabetes and they are like mandated to do a workshop every year or something. So as part of our health fair she is going to have a thing set up and people you know on diabetes. Because these are the things, the signs that something might be wrong and you're not noticing it, but if you are aware of the signs then you can catch it. Before you know it gets too. Economic development, I was the president from '92 to '98 and then Ed Mulraine was the president and I had this nice young man and he was the president but then you know with his church it was too much. But we try to do, I have a young girl that wants to do some type of seminar, some type of economic development seminar for entrepreneurs or something. So we try to bring information, we'll have legal forms, Hugh Campbell, Grottman and Campbell, he's with the Black Bar Association and the Bronx Bar Association. So like with him we'll get some of his people to come.

[End of Side A]

[Begin Side B]

SF: With the predatory lending. You got old folks that really fall into mess. Those are the types of things we try to do and that is why I got that award.

BP: What is the name of the award?

SF: It is the John E. Morsel award, this is with the regional conference, we won first place at. I hadn't been the president for a while but we pulled everything together. Because we try to get in all the different areas, fundraising of course is important, membership is important we are getting ready to have a membership, a life membership.

BP: How much is the annual membership right now?

SF: Thirty dollars, yeah not much. Thirty dollars that's all. The life membership is \$750, but you can pay it in installments of 10 over 10 years, 75 dollars. But we try to cover the areas.

BP: Does the branch work with any other organizations, churches, community groups?

SF: We've done stuff, this Thurgood Marshall thing we did, we brought the National Council of Negro Women in, matter of fact a lot of my members are of both organizations. I'm the assistant secretary of the National Council of Negro Women North Bronx section. My assistant secretary is the president of the National Council of Negro Women in Cohawk City.

BP: And what is her name?

SF: Joyce Howard. So we work with them, you cant get so much involved with politics because it is not a political organization. Basically that is who we work with. That's who

were going to do the health fair with, The National Council of Negro Women, but they are not having theirs until October, so we had to go on alone.

BP: How about the churches? Are any churches particularly active in this neighborhood, any black churches?

SF: The churches are doing their own thing. We all support each other, we buy their journal ads they buy our journal ads, go to their fairs, give them awards they give us awards. But the churches you know they doing their own thing, they have their own youth group and that is what we are really trying to work on building a youth group but the churches have their own thing. One of our presidents in the Bronx, John Lemon, he's got a youth group and he is actually working with two churches, I think maybe like two smaller churches, maybe that don't have too much going on so they come in and do NAACP with the churches. I just went to this 160 dollar fair because Reverend Thompson was our man of the year and they had about forty some people there. So he had his affair he does a lot with the police, we were supposed to have the police at our April meeting but we had the Nor'easter. They were going to talk about police and community relations and the things that they do within the community. Because a lot of the time people don't know what people do, you go to precinct council meetings and a lot of people, it's just a different set of people. Some of them need to come to the NAACP and see what we doing and some of the NAACP need to know what is going on over there.

BP: Would you say that it is mostly women who were involved in the branch?

SF: A lot of women. Their chairperson is a man. But it is just more women, I do not have my list in front of me.

BP: Since you've lived in this neighborhood, since 1948--

SF: 1950, my grandparents came in '48.

BP: Over 55 years, how have you seen it change? What would you say is one of the big things that you've noticed that has changed about African Americans in this neighborhood from living here, from working here, in schools and from your community activism with the branch?

SF: Well you know, there are still a lot of good folks there, a whole lot of us, who own the houses, who keep them, keep the community going. It keeps the community going because you got these one and two family houses even with the three family houses it's not going to be a problem. Moving these houses is a lot of money for the rent, so I think that's what keeps the neighborhood up. With the crime and stuff you got the renegades but some of them even come out of decent homes. So we just try to keep people aware of stuff, how to protect themselves, how to care for their community, because that is how you keep the community going. On my block we are getting a lot of Africans, everybody works there, they're not a problem. That's a good thing. Just moving into the neighborhood now, you have to have a certain amount of money. Then you do have areas that aren't as good but I'm not over there. But the schools are tough because you know you got the kids inside, you got the projects, and you just have parents that just don't maintain their kids the way they should. Look at that fool who was so drunk celebrating his two year olds birthday? What was that? He was so drunk, that he left the baby in the car, and went home and went to sleep? And they let him out of jail? That's the issue with the schools. You can't touch the kids you can't hardly do anything, you can't even have

them writing lines because that is corporal punishment. They minimize a lot of the ways you can punish a child when they are not doing the right thing. Everybody gets breakfast, free lunch, free everything and people get the feeling that well that's is what they are supposed to do , they are entitled to free. I don't know if that is so good in building communities and building families, no one has any responsibility for anything. Of course that affects the ones that need the food, I don't know what you do with that. Like I said the community maintains itself, they build these houses that are half a million dollars so you don't have poor folk living in there. The only thing I got a little afraid of, I was out walking one day and they built these two houses down on 211th St. and I saw these people on the stoop, some of them hanging over the banister and I said Oh Lord they start subsidizing these apartments, that was the only place I saw that and after that, I have not seen it anymore. I know the neighbors was raising Cane so whoever had the people in there they straightened it up. Because that is the only thing you really concerned about. As long as the rent is high. But you got the other areas, you got the kids out the projects, and of course you got the good kids there and you got the bad kids. Then you have a school system that every five seconds they changing the reading program and that is a whole other story. I guess as long as everybody tries we'll manage.

[Laughter]

BP: Well thank you. This was very helpful.

[End of Interview]