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Interviewee: Ray Hodge
Interviewers: Dr. Mark Naison, Dr. Mark Chapman and Mark Smith; Bronx, NY

Session # 1, nd.

Transcriber: Colleen McCafferty

Dr. Mark Naison (MN): Hello this is the 47th interview for the Bronx African American History Project. I'm interviewing Ray Hodge, who grew up in the Patterson Houses and who friends tell me was the greatest athlete to come out of that development. And who worked in youth programs for many years before he went into the private sector. So we'll begin in the beginning, when did your family first move to the Bronx?

Ray Hodge (RH): 1947, they lived on Prospect Ave, 163rd Street.

MN: And was this before you were born? What year were you born?

RH: I was born in 1947. So my thinking is - - because they came here early '47 - - so my mother was probably carrying me. They lived with my grandmother and then I was born in November. [Crosstalk]

MN: Now did they move to the Bronx from Harlem or from another part of the country?

RH: They came from St. Croix, US Virgin Islands.

MN: Oh and did they, they came directly to the Bronx from the Virgin Islands?

RH: I believe so, yes. My father was in the service, so I believe it ended '45 he probably was discharged shortly after that, maybe '46. I don't know the history there but I know that my mother came with my grandmother, and my father met her here. And they married in '47 and began their family.

MN: Now do you know how they found the Bronx? Were there other people from their hometown or family here first?

RH: I don't, I don't think so. But again, my grandmother might have had relatives who were in the borough; I'm not sure about that, I'm not sure.

MN: And what sort of work did your father do when your family first lived here?

RH: He was involved with ConEd. What exactly - - he probably had to do with electrical or maybe at the time just a laborer. From that he then - - and I'm not sure how long he was with ConEd, but he then became a recreation personnel for the state hospital on Ward's Island and he was there until he retired.

MN: Wow. Which was in - - ?

RH: Well I have to backtrack - - [Laughter] - - but I would say he is retired now twenty, close to twenty years.

MN: And he's still alive?

RH: Yes.

MN: And is your mother still alive?

RH: She is, she is.

MN: Because that may be an interesting interview - -

RH: She is. As a matter of fact, I spoke with my mother last night just to correlate the dates when we moved into the Patterson, when the family moved in to the Patterson and she said it was 1950.

MN: Well that's - - so they were part of the first group of families to move in when Patterson opened?

RH: Yes, yes and she explained that the method that the system followed was building, building, and once they - - our side, meaning I guess it would be west of 143rd Street since it goes up - - well I guess that's north - - that side was frequented first.

MN: Ok so, I know everybody talked about our side and the other side. You were in the north side, closer to eighteen - -

RH: To PS 18.

MN: - - and the schoolyard.

RH: Right, that's correct.

MN: And what was the number of your building?

RH: 291.

MN: Right, and a number of the people I spoke to were from 414 Morris, and it was 291 - - ?

RH: It's 291 East 143rd Street.

MN: Ok, so you were 291, right. But you and 414 played against the other side?

RH: You could say that.

MN: [Laughs] Was the apartment your family moved into more spacious than the one they were living in previously?

RH: Yes, yes.

MN: And was that one of the appeals of moving to - - ?

RH: It was, it was. The fact that you had your own apartment that contained not only the bedrooms but the kitchen and the bathroom was a plus.

MN: Now they were, in other words, they were living with your grandmother right until the time they moved?

RH: Yes, yes, I guess they were notified by public housing that there was an apartment available and they gave them a date to move in and they did.

MN: Was this seen as a step up for the families that moved in? A very optimistic, positive experience - - ?

RH: I would say yes, because, because the conditions that they left were basically one room, one room housing where you shared a bathroom, you shared the kitchen, and there were probably three to six other rooms on a floor. So you're looking at either three to six other families or three to six other individuals, or any combination, sharing a kitchen and bathroom on that floor.

MN: But now, do you have any actual recollection of your grandmother's apartment in your memory, or your earliest memories are in Patterson?

RH: No I remember an incident growing up in the apartment or room that we had where my grandmother was. And it was just basically one room and it was my parents and myself. And I think what prompted them to look to move was the fact that we didn't have space to grow. My sister was born in '49 - -

MN: And you were all living in one room?

RH: Yes, yes, and then from that you had to basically plan your trip to the bathroom around other people. You had to do the same with the kitchen, so it just became awkward.

RH: It's very interesting, because I think that's the way a lot of people are living in the Bronx now with all the immigrant families, and if you haven't lived that way its very difficult to describe.

RH: No, that's true, that's true.

MN: What are your earliest recollections of the Patterson Houses as a three year old?

[Laughs] What are the first things you remember about the new apartment, the new place?

RH: Well the fact that you're able to roam; you can go from one room to another room and still be within the confines of your living area. Where I came from once you left that room you're basically out of your environment and sharing the environment with everyone else. In terms of - -

MN: And how many rooms did your family have?

RH: We had three bedrooms.

MN: You had three bedrooms.

RH: I don't know how they were able to - - I guess because it was a boy and a girl - -

MN: Right so they needed a - -

RH: So I had a room, my sister had a room, and my parents had their room. And then going outside you were able to go to the park which was still within the confines of the project itself, even though it was a school park it was in, within walking distance. At the time there were more children than I was accustomed to, but in time there were many more children there.

MN: [Laughs] Now how clean - - was it a very well kept - - in terms of the cleanliness of the halls, the elevators and grounds - -

RH: Yes, yes, again I can only speak about my building and what's around my building, but 291 was kept well. Most of the residents in the building knew each other, supported each other, looked out for each other. It also spilled over into other areas, because I found

that going from my building to say 414, or 281, or 315, as you met the children that lived there you met their parents, they became your parents.

MN: So everybody looked out for everybody else?

RH: They did, they did.

MN: Now did this cross racial and ethnic lines, with, with Puerto Rican and black and white families - - ?

RH: It did.

MN: - - everybody was kind of in it together?

RH: We were. It didn't matter - - color was never an issue. And around the Patterson Projects you had your pockets of white community, Hispanic community - - Say in white - - this area's Italian this [Crosstalk] Irish - -

MN: Yes, yes, the Italians - - so you had an Irish neighborhood? Which was on the other side of Third Ave, was that Irish?

RH: Oh, let me see - -

MN: Where were these pockets?

RH: Ok, across from PS 18, which - - and I don't remember the street but it fed - - 145th lead into the street behind the park, the PS 18 park so you had - - which was primarily a white area - - And to differentiate whether they were Irish or Italian - - it's probably Irish. Then you went across Third Ave going towards Brooke, Morris, around 145th was primarily Hispanic, how far it stretched I wasn't sure. Then you had going the other way, 138th Street over in that area, was another pocket that would be considered a white area.

MN: And then you had the Italian area where Joey's - - the hero shop was - -?

RH: Yes, you're talking - - that's Morris Ave going towards 145th Street up in that area, so yes. But inside, inside the Patterson itself it was mixed.

MN: Right, now on your - - were people, the families on each floor kind of in and out of each other's houses, or was it more who you made friends with in terms of - - ?

RH: It's more the children themselves were in and out. You had some parents that were - - that spent more time visiting than others; my parents weren't visitors. My parents knew the other parents, they spoke with the other parents, but to just go over and visit, my parents weren't big on that.

MN: But the kids were in and out of each other's apartments a lot?

RH: We were. As we became older and more aware, I would say yes. In the beginning, when you're five, six, seven years old you visit but not as frequently as we did as we grew in age.

MN: Now what - - did you go to PS 18?

RH: Yes, I did.

MN: And what was that experience like? Your recollections of the school experience - -

RH: I had a good experience. We not only had students from the other side of the project but we also had students from the other areas surrounding the school. We didn't have racial problems; we didn't have any identification of well I'm black and you're white, that didn't exist. We were in school, we attended school, we knew each other, there was a respect between everyone, that, that was pretty good. As I said, I had a pretty good experience. The teachers that I was involved with had a concern for everyone they were teaching, they emphasized doing as well as we could.

MN: Was education stressed in your family? And so that spilled over into your school experience?

RH: I would say yes. My parents, well my mother primarily, knew my teachers. She was involved in what I had to do; she made sure that it was done. They kept a close rein on what I did, where I went, how I did it. When I was younger I couldn't be out after a certain time. And if I was to be out - - with another adult, someone that they had to know.

MN: Now how old were you when you started going to organized recreation or after school programs?

RH: I was ten and I was fortunate in that the older group, and I have to say when I - - Growing up in the Patterson we had age groups. I was in the youngest age group at the time, and we had the next oldest group and the group after that. The oldest group used to come and take me to play and it started out as softball, softball with them. That was my introduction to sports, in organized and unorganized.

MN: Really? So it started when you were ten. You hadn't played basketball before that?

RH: That was softball. I didn't start playing basketball until probably twelve.

MN: That's so - - that's amazing! So you started, the first sport you played was softball at age ten and basketball at twelve. So your parents didn't have you out playing ball when you were younger?

RH: [Laughs] Not at all, no. It's funny because my father, coming from the Virgin Islands, St. Croix, he played baseball. And he and his brothers were active in sports. But me, they - - as I said, they had a close rein on what I did, how I did it. I remember one event that prompted me I guess to become active in sports; one of the other young men in the project challenged me to a race. And I didn't have sneakers; I just had on a pair of

shoes that were thick and hard. And we raced and I beat him. And I guess after beating him that's when, and he was a little older but, that's what prompted those in that age group - - [Crosstalk]

MN: So the older kids were watching the race? This was a very public event?

RH: Well it was on the - - it was right outside on the sidewalk. We raced on the sidewalk of 143rd Street. And a lot of the things that sports-wise that were done in our early age were done in the project itself, be it on the sidewalk, in the parking area, or at the park at PS 18.

MN: Right, so they took you and started playing softball with you?

RH: Yes.

MN: And was there a team that they had with a name? Or it was just, it was pickup games?

RH: They had a name, and it changed. But the one that stuck with me was - - they called themselves the Clowns. Why? I don't know. And we in turn, being the youngest group, when we put our team together we were the Clown Tots.

MN: The Clown - -?

RH: Tots.

MN: Tots, ok. And who did you play against?

RH: Primarily teams from other areas. We would travel across 138th and Cyprus Ave and play in one of the schoolyards there, teams would come down from the Forest Projects to play us at PS 18, we would go behind Yankee Stadium to Macombs Dam Park and we played in the softball tournaments there. So we, although we had a lot of competition within the project, once we put our team together we went outside.

MN: And did you start playing baseball also in addition to softball at a certain point?

RH: Yes I did. Again, that was - - one of the older young men in the project took me to a tryout at St. Mary's Park. I didn't know what the tryout was about, he just took me and I was fortunate enough to be selected for the team and we participated in the New York Mirror baseball tournament, which was citywide. We were fortunate enough to win the Bronx championship and we won the City championship and we were - - and this, if I'm not mistaken was when I was 11 going on 12 - -

MN: So this would be 1958 or '59.

RH: Thereabouts, yes. By winning the city championship we were given the opportunity to play at Yankee Stadium, against the team that we beat. And, it should've been a very nice experience; for us it should've been a wonderful experience because we represented the Bronx, we won the City championship, and here we are in Yankee Stadium. And what didn't sit well with me, eventually the rest of the team, was that we were not allowed to sit in the home team's dugout, the Yankee's dugout. We had to sit on the visiting team's side. And my question to the coach is, if we're the City Champions, why are we treated as if we lost the championship? And that the Yankee officials told the coach that we had the visiting team's uniforms so we have to sit in the visiting team's dugout. And I told the coach that I don't think that that's a valid reason because we're the champions, doesn't matter what color our uniforms are, we're supposed to be recognized as the champions. And you know, we sat and we talked about it amongst ourselves and we came to the conclusion that it's because we're a mixed team, and the other team is from Staten Island and - - [Crosstalk]

MN: So you were a racially mixed team and that was an all white team?

RH: Yes, yes.

MN: Was that your first experience with racial discrimination hitting you in the face?

RH: Yes, yes it was.

MN: Really? Wow.

Mark Chapman (MC): Was this a - - what was the tournament? Was this like a CYO or -
- ?

RH: At the time it was the New York Mirror, which was a newspaper, sponsored a citywide baseball tournament. So every, every area that had a recreation facility, like PS 18, put together in this case a baseball team. And it was for if I'm not mistaken thirteen and under, so I was eleven I was able - - I met the age requirement, I was able to play. And we had the best team in the city, well we won the City - - And we were again a mixed team, black, Hispanic, and white. And we played against a team from Brooklyn in the semi-finals, we beat them. We played the team from Staten Island for the City championship and we beat them. And the one player that I remember on the team from Staten Island, his name was Terri Crowley, who eventually played for the Baltimore Orioles - -

MN: That Terri Crowley?

RH: But again, I said the experience should've been wonderful, but it wasn't. And instead of - - and my parents are Yankee Fans, which is strange because coming from St. Croix, most of the people there were Dodger Fans and that was primarily because of Jackie Robinson, but my mother was a Yankee Fan. I don't know why, she just was. And my father liked the Yankees, I guess because they were from the Bronx, but in time

because of Hank Aaron he became a Braves Fan. And it didn't sit well with us, and it still doesn't sit well with me.

MN: Now did you - - did that make you gravitate more towards basketball that experience?

RH: The experience, no. The fact that there really wasn't much available after twelve, thirteen years old in terms of playing baseball caused me to move away from baseball. I was still, and most of us at the Patterson were active in softball.

MN: Now Nathan mentioned a team called the Patterson Knights, was that a - - ?

RH: That was again, depending on who was running the team, that's the name they played - - that's the name they'd associate the team with. And that was a mix of not only guys from our side, but guys from the other side. That's when we again, pooled our resources and went out and played. The background of us growing up in the projects because of the other groups made us very competitive. We always competed against the groups older than us. The oldest group didn't - - they would on occasion compete against us - -

MN: Now did your group have better athletes than the older group in turn, or not necessarily?

RH: Depending. In time we probably did, we probably did. Physically they were bigger and stronger, but in terms of talent we were probably on a par if not slightly above where they were as a team, and we were - -

MN: Now I just want to backtrack a little before we go into the basketball experience. When you were growing up in Patterson, was music an important part of your experience?

RH: I would say yes, and in time music developed to the point where it carried over into the other ethnic areas. Again, my parents, for them music was Caribbean.

MN: So it was calypso at that time? Who were some of the artists popular at that time?

Mark is a student of Caribbean music.

RH: I would have to go back, the one that stands out is Sparrow - -

MN: The Mighty Sparrow.

RH: Yes, he stands out. There were others that I probably never paid attention to. You hear the music because it's played, but who the artist was - -

MN: But did you personally get more into the Rhythm & Blues and Doo Wop and that -
-

RH: Oh yes, because that's the elements that are around you. In terms of Doo Wop, in the fifties the older guys were outside putting groups together - -

MN: They were singing?

RH: - - trying to harmonize. So of course we see them, we're doing the same thing. We get together and we're over here and we're trying to emulate and copy what we hear on the radio. Even to the point where you put together a social club; you buy the same color sweater and you have a nickname - -

MN: Were you in a social club when you were younger?

RH: You could say yes.

MN: What was it called?

RH: I don't remember, I don't. All I remember is that we all had nicknames that ended with 'o', like Dino, or um I don't know - - everybody had a name that ended in 'o'.

MN: Now was there much gang activity when you were growing up? Or as a factor in your - -

RH: Within the project, no. But then within the project - - you couldn't come outside the project and try and cause a problem within. As we became older, and I'm saying middle school, high school, then some of the people within the project, stepped outside of the project to become part of a, a gang. Again, growing up you hear about the Fordham Baldies and you hear about some of the other gangs in other areas. Maybe we were shielded, protected, but within the project - -

MN: It sounds like you're talking about a bubble of a lot of safety and security, and a different almost kind of race relations than existed in most places.

RH: No, that's true, that's true. Again, the guys that would be in the older group, maybe they were, but it's something that we didn't see as we were growing up. And again, maybe it's something that I didn't see because of how my parents had me.

MN: So you were a little more protected then the average kid you would say?

RH: It's possible. I would say yes. And I say that because I'm in when a lot of my friends were out. I used to be teased about that and I tell them, hey, there's nothing I can do; those are my parents and that's what they want for me. Now as the, as the years passed and I became a little older I spent time at the center at PS 18, I spent time at the night center at PS 18.

MN: Right, so you went to both the after school center and the night center?

RH: I had the opportunity to, yes.

MN: Right, now at what age did you start going to the PS 18 center?

RH: That was - - well in the summer it was at an early age and during school time it was closer to ninth grade, closer to ninth grade.

MN: Did you go to Clark Junior High School?

RH: Yes, I did.

MN: And what was your experience there? Was it as positive as PS 18?

RH: It was, it was. I had a unique educational experience in that for one year they transferred me from PS 18 to PS 31, which was up on up 143rd Street and Grand Concourse. So I was able to meet because of that, for one year, a lot of the children that lived on the other side of the projects. And then going to PS - - to Clark I was again, back with those that I went with PS 18 and with those that came from PS 31. So it allowed me to be aware of just about everyone that came into seventh grade with me. We were also the first co-ed class to enter Clark. And I have to admit the reputation of Clark, before it became 149 it was junior high school 37, was that the guys coming in would be initiated by those already in the school because it was all boys I guess. And I don't remember any of us having that - - [Crosstalk]

MN: Going through a hazing thing, right.

RH: No.

MN: Were there any teachers at Clark that made a big impression on you?

RH: Mrs. Jones, I had her in ninth grade, had her for English. I'm trying to remember if she was my homeroom teacher also. But she instilled in me to be confident; to carry myself with an air of confidence. When she called on me, one day anyway, I stood up to answer the question, and she told me before I even started answering to stand up straight and hold my head up and when I speak to project my self within the room, out to others.

And she felt, because she told me, that I would be mayor of New York City one day.

[Laughs]

MN: Well, there's still time.

[Laughter]

RH: Well I live in Connecticut now.

MN: Oh so right - - we can give you a [Crosstalk] address.

RH: Trumbull, outside of Bridgeport.

MN: When did you start playing - - so you start basketball at age twelve, which is what seventh grade or eighth?

RH: Yes, seventh grade, seventh grade, when I started - -

MN: Now was that in the night center or was it in an organized program somewhere else?

RH: It was right outside in the park, in the park. That's where most of our sports experiences originated.

MN: In the park there?

RH: Yes. They built, well they didn't build, they had a - -wait, you visited the Patterson. So 291 and 301 are basically in the center of the north side and they had an area that was just open.

MN: Yes, and they had the full court basketball there.

RH: They put the baskets up, I don't remember when, but they put the baskets up. They had a full court and they had two that were off to the side.

MN: Now, when you started playing basketball you already had a reputation as a baseball player and as a runner? So there was - - you already had a kind of established

reputation as an athlete. Now when you started playing, were you playing with older guys or with kids your own age?

RH: Both, it was a - - with both. As I said, our group became very competitive, so we always [Indiscernible]

MN: Ok, now who was part of your particular group of kids who were playing?

RH: You had, well Bubba Dukes, Nathan Dukes, Ronald Carson, Arnold Melrose, Ray Thomas, Tiny was in and out with us, it depended if we were - - represented PS 18, Tiny was with us. If we were playing amongst ourselves or a group going out then Tiny wasn't with us. But that was the, that was the core. Like Bubba and I and a few others we would leave the Patterson. We would go to 103rd Street and play. We would go up to Edenwald and play.

MN: And this is when you were twelve or thirteen?

RH: No, we were a little older - -

MN: A little older, ok - -

RH: But we would get on the train and play.

MN: Now was your group starting to get a reputation in house - - around as a particularly strong cohort? Because those are some pretty good athletes you're talking about. Or was -
-

RH: We didn't think about it. We didn't have a concern if we had a reputation or not; we just went and played. We were fortunate in most of the places where we competed we won. And because we went out and played in other areas it gave us the opportunity to develop.

MN: Now were people - - were older guys coaching you when you started playing?

Would someone say shoot like this not like that?

RH: No.

MN: It was all self-taught?

RH: Yes, yes. We didn't have what the kids have today in terms of a lot of specialized coaching or community involvement - -

MN: When was the first time you actually had organized coaching? Was a coach working with you on your shooting on your passing techniques - - and this is how you - -

RH: We really - - we had people who coached us; showed us some plays, substituted taking us in and out - - but in terms of mechanics and techniques, we didn't have that.

MN: Now what about - - were you in the Hilton White program?

RH: I didn't go with Bubba to the Falcons. We played - - what prompted - - we played representing St. Rita's.

MN: The Catholic - -

RH: The Catholic school on the corner or I guess it was Colgate Ave. One of the fathers, his son went to LaSalle High School. And again we were pretty good and he put us together as a team. And we played under the name St. Rita's. And we played in a few tournaments, we were successful in some and we played at Woodstock, which is off 163rd Street and Eagle Ave in the - - up in the mid Bronx. And that's where Hilton White had his tournament. And he had maybe three teams that represented the Falcons and there were other teams that came to the tournament. And we played the - - well we played in the playoffs, and we beat one Falcon team. Then we played and we beat another Falcon team and he brought a third Falcon team for us to play in the championship. He threw in - - and

he reffed (refereed) the championship game - - he threw Eric Brown who went to Powell Memorial, he threw Eric out the game. He gave him two ticks and got him out the game, which was probably pretty good for me, because I then went on and won the MVP award for that game. We lost the game, which was his intention, but I played pretty well, Bubba played well, but we didn't play well enough to win. So after that, Hilton had in his own way approached Bubba about coming to play. And indirectly he made some innuendos about me coming to play, but I decided that I didn't want to participate. Maybe I should have - - probably would have further developed my my playing ability and given me more exposure.

MN: Now what position did you play at that time?

RH: Probably a swing between guard and forward, depending on who was in the game.

MN: Was your game more a taking it to the basket or a shooting from the outside?

RH: In the beginning it was taking - - going to the basket. And as the years passed I developed a perimeter game as they call it now.

MN: Did you have a signature move that you developed when you were younger that - -

RH: Not like they have now. Now you're talking about the break foot crossover - - No, whatever I was able to do to score that's what was done.

MN: What high school did you go to?

RH: Dewitt Clinton.

MN: So you went to Clinton also. Now were you in the same grade as Bubba or older?

RH: Same grade.

MN: See, now Bubba describes Clinton as a highly competitive place to make the team.

RH: Very.

MN: So what was it like? You entered in ninth grade or tenth grade?

RH: Tenth grade. [Crosstalk]

MN: Did you make the team in tenth grade?

RH: I was on the JV.

MN: You were on the JV.

[RH Laughs]

Mark Smith (MS): Was this early sixties?

RH: This is '63, yes '63 I was in tenth grade. They had a very good basketball team.

Two - - One of the players, Willie Waresly, went on to play in the NBA. My class, on the JV we had Luther Green who went to LIU and ended up with the Nets for a little while, Ollie Taylor who went to Houston and played with the Nets also for a little while - - If I'm not mistaken Bubba and I were on the JV. But you'd, you'd go to practice you'd sit on the side and the varsity got all the work. It wasn't the situation where your skills determined whether or not you made the team, it was basically the varsity players telling the coach who to add and who to drop.

MN: Really? So it was politics - - a lot of politics?

RH: A lot of politics, a lot of politics. You had Clinton - - even though it's a school in the Bronx had schools from Manhattan that were eligible to attend Dewitt Clinton. So you had some Manhattan players that came up and were on the team and they seemed to have the coach's ear, so they would look out for their friends. And on the JV you had a lot of open door - - one day this person would be there and then the next day he's gone and this person would be there. So I stayed with that for maybe two months and then I decided that that wasn't what I wanted. I was also at the time playing with an

organization called the Nobles. Who were housed in the north Bronx, on Castle Hill Ave.

Bubba and I were playing - -

MN: Wow; Castle Hill and where?

RH: Off Westchester Ave. It was a school 125, 120 - - I can't remember the name of the school, but that's where we used to go to practice. So as long as I wasn't playing varsity I could play with this team. This team was probably as good as the best team in New York City.

MN: The best varsity team?

RH: Yes.

MN: Wow.

RH: We scrimmaged against Columbus - - I can't remember his name but he was one of the all-city players in '63 - -

MN: There was a kid named Kessler that was a point guard at Columbus - -

RH: - - at Columbus. No, it wasn't Kessler. This was - - he was a bigger more physical - - [Crosstalk] - - Albee Grant.

MN: Albee Grant, yes, yes.

RH: So in the scrimmage we played them I'll say to a standstill, but if it had been a competitive game we would have beat them. So being with them I probably learned and developed more than I was under JV with Leonard.

Dr. Mark Chapman (MC): This would've been what - - similar to the baseball program, a sponsored tournament - -

RH: Yes, yes, at the time it might have been the Daily News or the Daily Mirror. But in my early years of growing up in the city a lot of the citywide programs were sponsored

by either the newspapers or community groups that put the programs together to allow the youth throughout the city the opportunity to participate.

MN: So there was a tremendous amount of youth activity and recreation available when you were growing up?

RH: Yes.

MN: Now what was the academics like at Clinton? Was it as good as it was at PS 18 or Clark Junior High School?

RH: It - - because of the number of people in attendance, when I first went we had over 6,000 - - 6,000 males at Dewitt Clinton.

MN: 6,000 males at one school!

RH: We were on a triple shift - -

MN: Talk about testosterone city.

RH: Yes, but again because of my elementary and middle school I was probably placed in a track that put me in the higher academic areas. So - - and I had teachers - -

MC: Was the school predominantly black or was it - - ?

RH: What Dewitt Clinton? No at that time it was predominantly white.

MC: Is that right?

RH: Yes, predominantly white.

MN: John Aaronburg attended the school at that time; he was on the baseball team. This is one of our friends and colleagues. Now did you try out for baseball - -

RH: No no, I ended up running.

MN: Running, ok, so you were on the track team. And what was your event?

RH: Sprint. When I first started it was indoors so I was running the 4 by 2, and we didn't break our novice - - because at that time you had to win a medal to become a varsity runner, until you won a medal you were on the novice team.

MN: So Clinton has some serious sports, getting - -

[END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

RH: - - during my sophomore year.

MC: [Crosstalk] And you run your junior and senior year?

RH: No.

MC: So you were basically - - Were you making a statement? Because clearly you had the ability and the talent to play - -

RH: Well he asked me in my senior year.

MN: Well you know Bubba didn't play varsity until his senior year. Let's think about this - - and you ended up - - so you played only recreational basketball and ran track - -

RH: Right.

MN: And then ended up an All-American in college. So that gives you an idea how good the players were in the recreational programs.

MC: And it speaks to the fact that the high school basketball program was that competitive; or was it the politics that you indicated earlier?

RH: It was the politics. I felt that I could have made the team, but looking at it - - and what really prompted me was - - one of the persons that were bounced around was Bubba. And he and I were going everyday, and one day he wasn't there. And in his place was someone else that one of the varsity players had told coach to put on the team. So - -

MN: And was Bubba a major talent at that time would you say?

RH: I would say yes, I would say yes. So much so that again, he and I played on the team at Castle Hill called the Nobles - - And the first year we didn't win the city championship because one of the players on the team had played unknowingly 48 seconds of varsity basketball for Columbus High School. My second year, when we played together we didn't win the city championships because I had appendicitis and wasn't able to play the semifinal game. And my last year with the Nobles, which was my worst team of the three years we won the city championship.

MN: Now when you were running track - - You were on varsity in track from the time you were a sophomore?

RH: No, no you had to win a medal to become a varsity runner. So what happens is you go to a meet and you have to break you novice, that's what it's called. And you break it by finishing first, second, third in the meet or if you go to the novice championships then you have six opportunities to - - But what happened with me - - in the junior year, when I had appendicitis I couldn't run indoor. Just to backtrack, I had never had any type of injury throughout my life's experience, and the day that I didn't go to school became a major event for all my friends because I never missed a day of school. So when they came, and we always traveled on the train together, when they came to get me and my mother told them that I wasn't going it was like, 'what, what?' And then when they found out I had emergency surgery that evening it became even a bigger issue.

MN: Now tell Mark and Mark about the booty train, because this is I don't think they've ever heard the story.

[Crosstalk]

RH: [Laughs] Well its - - we became introduced to the booty train in tenth grade. Again, you're looking at an all male high school and the next stop down the line is an all female high school. My first year we were on triple, triple session so I had to report to school at 7 and I was out of school by 12:45, 1 o'clock at the latest. Then you had another session that came and another session after that. The middle session probably got out of school around three and then you had the late session, I think they finished around five. The girls were out of Walton I think 2:50, so the guys at Clinton had scheduled down that such-and-such a train would put you at Kingsbridge at such-and-such a time and that's when all the girls got on. So you had guys who went to school just to ride that train, to meet these girls, and I'm sure that there were girls that came out of Walton that were looking at their watches, 'yep, they're going to be on this train.' So it was a mutuality between the two schools that they would ride this train. It was probably, and I say that because I never waited around to ride the train - - for me it didn't make sense. Get out of school at one to sit another two hours just to ride the train so you can stand up behind a girl, hold the pole, hold her, no, no, no. Of course you had some guys that took it a lot further because there were some girls that ended up having their clothes ripped off or being physically accosted so - - And it developed to the point where you had administrators in both schools trying to monitor the situation. But that was - - when we first went to Clinton - -

MN: That was a legendary experience. [Crosstalk]

RH: - - one we heard about.

MN: Now when you went to Clinton, did you know you were going to go to college?

Was this an aspiration that had been planted in you by your parents and teachers?

RH: No, no, and that's one of the - - one of the sorrows that I find myself thinking about.

I wasn't prepared in my senior year to answer the college question. Nor did I have counselors prompting me to address that question. I think for my parents it was an accomplishment for me to finish high school. [Interruption] In order to finish high school this person that I was playing basketball for, A. Raskin was the one who went to my parents and said we have to see about getting Ray into college.

MN: So he was the one who made the connection to Wagner? Or was that a more - - did you go right into - -? [Crosstalk]

RH: Wagner, Wagner was by chance. A. Raskin spoke to Lou Rouseni at LIU. No Rory Reuben was at LIU, Lou Rouseni was at NYU; he spoke to both of them about me. He took me to NYU basically for a tryout so Lou Rouseni could get an idea of what I was capable of doing. He liked me so much that he had me thinking that I was going to NYU. But it didn't materialize. Rory Reuben said that I didn't play high school basketball so he didn't want to give me the opportunity to show him anything. And I'm sure Abe spoke to a few other people. From PS 18, Ray Felix went out to Wagner and spoke to them on my behalf. And again it was the same story, I didn't play high school they had nothing to gauge it on so they left it at that. I have to admit that it was Abe Raskin who was the one that - - planted the seed that I should be going to college.

MN: Now did you go to Wagner directly out of high school or did you wait awhile?

RH: I waited six months.

MN: Six months.

RH: One, I had to raise some funds, and I had to send applications out - -

MN: So in other words this was all done after you had graduated - - the application?

RH: Shortly after, yes.

MN: So there wasn't a very effective college counseling program?

RH: Not for me, and I'm sure that it was probably the same for most of the other students. Maybe if you played basketball you were handed a letter from a school that was interested in you, but - -

MN: Now what about most of your friends from Patterson? Did they go - - were they - - did most of them end up going to college of your - - that group?

RH: Some yes; thinking back Bubba did, Arnold ended up going to school, Tiny was a year later, Luther went to LIU, so a few did. I would think that most didn't. And of those that were left eventually some did, some did - -

MN: Now when do you first recall feeling that things were starting to fall apart a little bit at Patterson?

RH: Oh that's probably - - my parents moved out - - I graduated from Wagner in '70 and my parents moved out of the Patterson later '72 probably, maybe '75, '76.

MN: But you - - because did you have any - - with what heroin was doing? It didn't hit your building earlier?

RH: Growing up the - - the first introduction that I knew of was sniffing glue. I had a friend that lived in my building that was sniffing glue. When we found out we pounded him up a little bit to see if that would get him to stop, it didn't. From that he probably graduated to whatever was out there for him. Most, and I again, those that I knew, those that I was closest to, most of us weren't exposed, had nothing to do with that. I had another friend who smoked a lot, he smoked a lot of marijuana. And as the years passed he graduated from marijuana to adrenaline. When the transition occurred in the project - -

I would think had to be late, mid to late seventies. And it took the project by storm, for those that were still in the project.

MN: And where did your parents move to when they left?

RH: To the east Bronx; Bruckner Boulevard, the Soundview Area.

MN: Ok did they move into one of the Mitchell-ama Places or into a house or - - ?

RH: It was a co-op. I don't think it was Mitchell-ama, Mitchell-ama was a little higher up. Whoever ran this development was - -

MN: Now what was Wagner like to go to school? Were you living out there or commuting?

RH: Yes, no I lived out there. Again Wagner was a predominantly white, mid to upper class, supposedly Lutheran college.

MN: Now what was your religious background?

RH: I was a Lutheran.

MN: What church did you go to when you were growing up?

RH: Transfiguration which was in Manhattan off of, or close to Riverside Drive. We started there because some islanders attended that church and my grandmother knew them, my parents knew them, so we went there. As I became a little older we went to Bethany which is 163rd off Eagle Ave.

MN: So that was a Lutheran church in Morrisania basically or a little - - ?

RH: A little north of Morrisania probably since it was on the other side of Third Ave, but yes.

MN: And what age did you start attending that particular church?

RH: Twelve or so.

MN: Now is it still there, that church?

RH: Church is still there, my mother still attends.

MN: Really?

RH: She does.

MC: Bethany Lutheran Church?

RH: Bethany - - I think they changed the name but the church is still there. As you go up 163rd Street from Third Ave the church would be on your left hand side. Maybe its called All Saints now.

MN: Ok I think I passed that when we were going to Johnson's Barbeque, near the Forrest Houses.

RH: Ok.

MN: Did you play freshman ball at Wagner?

RH: Yes, I did.

MN: And was that when you really started to take off and people started to notice you in organized ball, or it was in the varsity area that you really started to take off?

RH: I had a good freshman campaign, that's what the coach based me getting a scholarship on. After - - so after my freshman year I was awarded a full scholarship.

MN: And how many points a game did you average on the freshman team?

RH: About 22, about 22. I led the team in scoring, I led the team in rebounding, [Laughs] I led the team in assists. I found it ironic because I attended Wagner in January and I was working out with the team and I thought I had presented to the coach what I was capable of doing but he said, 'well, you didn't play high school basketball - -' So I said alright, so he said, 'we'll look at your freshman year and we'll make a - -' [Crosstalk]

MN: So you paid your way as a freshman.

RH: Yes I did, I did. It wasn't that expensive I think. Tuition, room and board - - it wasn't what it is today.

MC: So they played - - the season what was in the second semester, in the Spring semester?

RH: I didn't play. I had the opportunity, he told me you have a choice you can either play freshman, finish out the freshman year or you can wait.

MC: Oh so you red-shirted so to speak?

RH: Well you call it red-shirting but - -

MC: You played freshman year in your second, basically second semester?

RH: In my second semester; in my first full year.

MN: And then they gave you the full scholarship after that?

RH: After my - - after that year completed, yes. I came back as a sophomore with a full scholarship.

MN: Now who were the schools Wagner was playing?

RH: Fordham, NYU - -

MN: Oh Mark, could you close the door? Yes - -

RH: NYU, Manhattan, Iona - -

MN: Did you play at the Garden at all, in any of your games?

RH: No, no, never played a college basketball game at the Garden. We had my sophomore year we had - - we were twenty and five with a few games left, and I was petitioning to play in the NIT. I would kind of practice and I would write on my practice shirt 'NIT loves Wagner', Wagner NIT valentine, and the coach came to me and said,

‘Ray, I don’t think you should do that anymore’ and I said, ‘well, why coach?’ He said, ‘we’re not going to the NIT.’ I said, ‘well coach, if we lose one game in the NIT do you know the recognition - - that’ll help recruit, that’ll - - ’ He said no, we’re going to the NCAA small college and we’re going to whatever conference Wagner played in, we went to that, I said, ‘ok coach.’

MN: So they - - there was a small college NCAA tournament?

RH: Well it’s the NCAA college division. So we were fortunate enough to get an invite to that. We lost the Eastern Regionals to Chaney State. Don Chaney was the coach, coaches Temple now. He had Greg Philmore and two other players over 6’8”.

MC: And at that time the NIT was more prestigious than the NCAA?

RH: It was, it was.

MC: Now Flip is more - -

RH: Yes, yes. Butch didn’t have a vision - -

MN: Now when you - - when did you start thinking you had a shot at playing professional basketball? When did that get on your radar screen?

RH: After my sophomore year. And it’s more because of what my coach said to me as opposed to what I actually thought. But I ended up having a good sophomore year and coach asked me - - well the coach made a statement, ‘what do you think you’re going to do after you graduate?’ And a friend of mine said, ‘he’s going to play pro ball.’ And the coach looked at her, and the coach looked at her and he said, ‘well if he’s good enough he might make the ABA.’ So I listened to what he said, and this is my coach and he’s actually saying he doesn’t think I’m good enough to make the NBA, but I’m so - - Then I quietly put it in the back of my mind that I’m going to raise the level of my play.

MN: Right, now what was your major at Wagner?

RH: Economics.

MN: So what was your pro experience after you graduated?

RH: Well it was brief. I was fortunate in that I was drafted in the NBA and the ABA.

Unfortunately I was drafted by the Knicks who just won the NBA championship and the Utah Stars who had just won the ABA championship. The Knicks at that time were loaded; they had a nucleus of eight players that weren't going anywhere. Phil Jackson was coming back from back surgery, so that made ten. The number one draft pick was eleven, so that left one spot open. And I, having confidence in myself, I felt I could make the team. And that's what I told the representative from the Utah Stars, who's name evades me right now. But he said, 'Ray you probably have a sixty or seventy percent opportunity to make my team, with the Knicks its less than thirty percent.' I said, 'but I can make the Knicks.' And that's what I told my father, 'I'm going to try out for the Knicks.' So during the rookie camp I guess I opened some eyes because I came in as a seventh round draft pick and I was asked to stay for veterans' camp. As camp went on and I played some pre-season games a reporter from the Post felt that I had made the team so much so that he wrote an article about me. And when I saw him I told him some things he put in the article were incorrect, he said, 'we have all season to correct it.' So I said, 'well he's pretty enthusiastic about me, maybe there's a shot.' I also felt that when Dick Barnett hurt his finger that that opened the door for me.

MN: So you were by now an off guard, would you say it was that - - would you or - -?

RH: I was a guard. At that time there was no point.

MN: Oh it was just a guard?

RH: You had to be able to dribble, pass, play defense, score - - Not like today but - - so I'm listening to the reporter, I'm looking - - I know the kid from Indiana that they drafted number one was going to play, well was going to stay cause he's the number one draft pick and you don't want to look bad cutting the number one pick. And not because of anything, I was clearly better. Truth of the matter is I should've played, but again there were some political issues that I didn't know of that didn't allow me to, to - - So Red Holstin came to me the last day and he said, 'Ray I'm putting you on waivers.' And he said not because I have the ability to play but this is Milt Williams' third year trying out and I'm giving him the spot. So there wasn't anything I could say to that; he's giving it to him because - - and that was that. So the guy from the Allentown Jets, which was I guess the feeder team for the Knicks quietly signed me to play with him so I was there for, I don't know twelve, ten games. But you only played on the weekends and you're traveling to the middle of Pennsylvania, nowhere, Friday night, Saturday morning to play Saturday and Sunday. They let the coach go and they brought in another guy so that he wants to bring in his guys. So it's like you get rid of this crew, bring in this crew. And that was the extent of my pro experience. The following year Red called me to come back to the team, but they had drafted Dean as their number one pick, so I said, 'Red, I'm in the same position; you drafted a guard he's guaranteed. I'm coming in basically as a walk-on, what are you saying to me?' Says, 'oh, I want you to come to camp.' So I say I don't see where it's going to be beneficial, advantageous. And that was it. After that I never looked at it again.

MN: And you just decided to pursue a career?

RH: I did. I said based on that experience - - because I remember how I felt when Red told me I was placed on waivers and it had nothing to do with ability it just had to do with someone else being given the opportunity. It took me about two days to get over that and then I said well here it is - - I didn't grow up planning or aspiring to be a professional athlete, but there are many others who do. And there are many who fall into this same predicament that I did. So I'm going to do whatever I can to open their eyes and let them know that you have to plan for more than just being a professional athlete. And that's what prompted me really to go into recreation - - the city of New York. I met a lot of people, a lot of athletes that I tried to direct and hopefully some of what I spoke to them about remained with them.

MC: So what was your career? Your professional career - -

RH: Besides - - well, working with the Department of Recreation, I did that for about eighteen, nineteen years - -

MN: You started in Brooklyn? Or did you start in the Bronx?

RH: Well I started - - being placed on waivers by the Knicks - - Cal Ramsey spoke to me about some things that the Urban Coalition had. And one of them was a pilot project that they were working on within the public school system and that was to develop the alternative school system. To take at-risk students and put them in a smaller confined setting and try and help them finish high school. I did that and I worked at what was called Wingate Prep. And we were working with students from Wingate High School who were having problems. I was there for about four years; we were doing a pretty good job, so much so that the new principal wanted to incorporate us back into his system. The only problem is he wanted to incorporate us and do away with a lot of the policies and

teaching procedures that we had developed. So it didn't become a very pleasant place to be and that's when most of us left the alternative school program. While I was there I was also involved with the Department of Recreation for New York and so I just - - instead of doing both I was now just working Recreation.

MN: Now where were you living at that time?

RH: In the Bronx; I was in the Bronx, I was commuting to Brooklyn.

MN: Where was your apartment at that time?

RH: What's it called? Parkchester. And I was in Parkchester for four years or so and then traveling between the Bronx and Brooklyn. But then recreation - - the center that I was assigned to was in the Bronx, so that made the commute a lot easier.

MN: Now when you were at Wingate Prep, were you teaching? Were you a classroom teacher - - were you doing more one to one type of work with kids?

RH: It was more one to one. The title was neighborhood school worker; the assignment was being similar to a dean of students. I interfaced with the students, with their parents, sat down with the teachers to see what the problem was, brought in community involvement, local vendors for sponsorship or job opportunities to help the students if they had financial problems - -

MN: When did you start seeing the world young people grew up in change radically from the world you grew up in? Was there a moment when you said, 'my god, these kids are coming from a very different world than I was and their in more trouble?'

RH: Again, that has to be mid to late seventies. Being involved in the alternative school program you do see, you see quite a bit and you're able to compare past to present, present to present. That's when I started realizing that things were changing.

MN: What do you think accounted - - if you're going to look at it, what do you think first what was the difference and then what do you think made the difference? What were some of the things these kids were dealing with that you didn't have to deal with - -in mid to late seventies?

RH: I think one - strength of family. Most of the students at-risk seemed to have broken homes, parental problems - - they also had a lot of negative peer pressure, 'you're not a good student because - - so you should be with us.' There was also a lack of respect, not only for each other but from adult to adult. If you spoke to a parent about their child it was - - they never had a problem.

MN: Ok, so when you were growing up most of the families were two parent families in Patterson would you say?

RH: I would say most, but not all. You had some single parent households, but you had the feeling that it didn't matter; you still had the respect for that person, that person still had the respect for you. Parents didn't necessarily coddle and protect when you were wrong, which happens a lot today. If you speak to a parent about their child the first thing they'll tell you is 'that can't be;' that's not true. To remedy a problem you have to be open to hear the problem. If you don't want to remedy the problem you're going to do what a lot of parents do today, 'don't speak to my son, I'll speak to him.' Without that, that interaction you can't accomplish anything. That's why I said growing up we without knowing it had had a strong family tie, which spilt over into a strong community tie, which made us stronger individuals, because we weren't - - we were sheltered, I was sheltered, but we weren't coddled. When we were wrong, we were wrong; we had to answer to that. So today there's no accountability, unless you wind up to the point where

- - you're taken to court, you're placed here, you're placed there. Too many of our young people now do wrong and are allowed to walk away from it because when they're presented with it our parents take them away, say no that's not mine - -

MN: And you started noticing that by let's say the late seventies?

RH: I did - - mid to late seventies.

MN: That something was changing. You didn't have the accountability you didn't have everybody looking out for each other's kids; it was almost just us against the world.

RH: [Laughs] Yes, yes, and that's unfortunate because a lot - - and I guess it stems from my generation because a lot of the younger children that I encountered their parents would be my age or a little older.

MN: So your contemporaries were the ones that brought up their children differently?

RH: I would say yes, I would say yes.

MN: Wow. What - - And now the question is why?

[Laughter]

RH: I don't know if I can answer that question. I know that I look at my children and there are signs that - - now my older son just turned 18 - - there are signs that he is trying to develop an independence, which is fine as long as you develop that independence within the rules and policies that you have to follow through life. I think maybe subconsciously some of us didn't appreciate the type of upbringing that we had. Maybe in some instances our parents were too strict, too rigid, too determined in the path that they had to bring us up. So instead of maintaining and carrying that upbringing it's, 'well I don't want my children to, to be denied anything, I don't want them to have to stay in

after 8 o'clock, I don't want them to not be able to socialize,' whatever. Maybe the strength that we had became a weakness as some of us became older.

MS: That's very interesting. Because it's like as Americans we always want our our kids to have what we didn't have, or at least I know my parents do. And it just seems like it went away from a more financial and economic standpoint to more of a spiritual and mental standpoint, where they didn't have the freedom as kids and they thought that was a bad thing. This is the first time I've heard why - - because I always wondered how this could happen in a period of fifteen years, this change, and that makes a lot of sense. That parents didn't want what they had, that their parents gave them and thought it wasn't valuable, and - - that makes a lot of sense.

MC: Well in addition to all the different changes in the society and the culture, you had - - you mentioned the influx of drugs, break up of families, I mean it's a complex - -

MN: Jobs moving out and the fiscal crisis, the Vietnam War, a lot of different things - -

MC: But what is fascinating to me when I listen to you describe your upbringing - - you were members of the Lutheran Church, many African Americans in the Bronx for the most part were members of Methodist or Baptist churches. So you had a, I guess a non-typical experience in that respect. Going to Dewitt Clinton High School and doing well - - you had to have done well academically to succeed, graduate from Wagner majoring in economics. What I'm trying to piece together is you had this kind of academic background and family experience that afforded you the kind of internal, I guess fortitude and also discipline to do well at Wagner, major in economics. But yet there was not, either I guess in your family expectation or in the guidance counselor's expectation some

preparation for your, for your college experience. Which seems quite atypical to an otherwise rather - - you see what I'm grappling at?

RH: I do, I do - -

MC: How does that happen? Because your parents didn't go to college and didn't expect it of you even though you had no doubt gifts that were quite evident?

RH: But see I know that my mother graduated high school, I'm not sure about my father, I think as I said or mentioned earlier that the expectation of my father was to graduate from high school. I believe that in terms of going beyond that they felt that somewhere throughout the school system something would be channeled to me, to prompt me in that direction. They never experienced pursuing a college. It's something they had no clue how to go about.

MC: They expected others to help you do that?

RH: I think so.

MN: Now were you as well spoken as - - you mentioned this teacher who said you should be mayor - - Were you as well spoken when you graduated from college as you are now? In other words, able to go before a group with this kind of confidence - -

RH: I believe so, I believe so. My experience through school - - going into Clark in seventh grade I ran for student government, so in my three years I was the first one to be elected to each position in each grade. I had friends that worked as my campaign committee, that's probably why she felt that I would've been mayor. In terms of making presentations and speaking to groups, I've done that throughout my lifetime. So - -

MN: Did you run for student government at Wagner?

RH: No, no I didn't. [Cough] Excuse me. It - - Wagner was a unique experience, in that when I first went to this school I was involved with a committee to bring entertainment to the campus. How I got involved in that I don't know, because I didn't know anybody and the first person that came was Dionne Warwick. Then the following year was when I played basketball and that seemed to consume a lot of time from October through March. So during that time I was involved in little things, but not major, major - - So I was just one of the fortunates, really.

MC: What was the black student life like on the campus? I'm thinking about - - you were there in the mid to late sixties; Malcolm was killed in '65, King killed in '68, the Black Panthers organizing in '66 on the West Coast but they had chapters in New York City - - Do you recall a kind of Black Nationalist rhetoric or ethos there at Wagner in any way?

RH: We had started an organization called Black Concern. I think the problem with that organization was not all of the black students on campus really believed in being a part of the organization, but to defer any type of pressure from any of the other black students they would get involved. And my background is a lot different in that I grew up with a mixed group. I went to schools that were predominantly white, mixed, close to predominantly minority. So I was comfortable wherever I was, I didn't have to inject my ethnicity towards anyone; if you didn't like me it didn't matter because I didn't have to be with you. My experience at Wagner was the same way. A person told me one day that I look at you and you're here, but you're not really among what's going on. Now I said there's some people that I'm not involved with, so it doesn't bother me. Part of the times that you speak of the Black Concern organization trying to get Wagner to increase it's recruitment of minority students organized a takeover of the administration building. I

was a senior and they didn't want me to be involved because I was a senior, but I told them that I was going to be involved. Because one - I wanted to make sure that no one did anything silly, I told them stupid. And I said two - it should be done because the school needs to change the recruiting policy that they follow. In terms of minority students they had no recruiting policy. They would go to Long Island, New Jersey, certain parts of Pennsylvania, upstate New York, they never came into New York City to try and recruit, introduce themselves, and offer an opportunity for inner-city students to attend Wagner. When you looked the time that I was there, and a friend pointed this out to me, the majority of the black males were athletes. Of the athletes, of the black athletes maybe 80% came from Staten Island. I'm a walk-on; I'm a walk-on see, so they had no interest in bringing minorities to Wagner. They took over the building and as I said one of the persons was doing something silly, pulled a knife on a security guard that was making his rounds; he was also on the basketball team. And he has the guard sitting there with the knife at his throat and I'm saying, 'why?' I don't know how I ended up where he was, but why; its not like - - you see this guard everyday on campus. First of all he's about 60 plus. For you to do this to him doesn't make sense, for you to put yourself - - So anyway I told the guard to take a few minutes and just leave when he was ready. And this person, I guess he felt that that's what he had to do to show that he was part of what was going on. Meanwhile he's not - - he came from the New Brunswick area of New Jersey, which was probably as lightly minority populated as any area you could think of - -

[END OF TAPE ONE; CONTINUE TO TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE]

MN: - - Recall back to the question that Dr. Chapman asked about what made you disillusioned with Wagner because I - -

RH: Well I had mentioned after speaking that I became disillusioned with Wagner in my senior year. After the takeover of the administration building and four days of sitting in and threats and - - that the school promised to meet with the representatives of Black Concern to put together some type of program to recruit minorities and they were going to do it within five days. Two weeks went by; no word, no communication, so the students were going to the president's office to find out what was going on. The president wasn't in so we sat in with the Dean of Students and we asked the Dean, 'what's going to happen? Where's the president? What answers are there - - ?' So he said I don't know, I can't give you any, this, this and that. So the Dean of Men, who I never had good feelings for, told us that if we didn't let the Dean out of the room there were going to be problems. He never asked the Dean if he felt threatened, he never asked the Dean if he wanted to leave, he just assumed that we were holding this guy hostage. The door is there, the Dean's sitting here, we're all back here. It's a classroom setting, similar - - Now, we were in his office but his desk is here, all the chairs are here, people are standing up - - So now it becomes a personal issue, you see. He still didn't get up to leave, he never asked him 'do you want leave,' he never opened the door. The door wasn't locked; no one was barricading the door. So he said if you're not out in fifteen minutes, we're taking action. Well fifteen minutes came, fifteen minutes went, he got up and left. Dean of - - Dean of Men is now writing down names. There's an article in the Staten Island Advance that twenty-seven students who disrupted College Day have been expelled. Now the organization that disrupted College Day was a white radical group. No one in this room is white, but we're now responsible for the disruption of College Day, ok. They subpoenaed everybody, took us to court. Now I was twenty-one, another person was twenty-one;

we're the only two that can be subpoenaed. The others have to be subpoenaed through their parents.

MC: Through student court or you mean the - -?

RH: No, civil court; yes, yes. They took all of us to civil court. So the lawyer, our lawyer said that the subpoenas were served incorrectly. There are twenty-five students that are considered minors; their parents have to be served first then their served. So you don't have a case. So the lawyer said, 'well we're not going to try the two without the other twenty-five, so this is gone.' The school wasn't happy with that, they decided that they had to have internal hearings. And they brought all twenty-seven of us before a board and had the hearings. They decided before that we were expelled, so no matter what was said, what was presented, that was the outcome. And after, when it was established that Dean Haas never attempted to leave, Dean Haas was never held against his will, Dean Haas was never asked by Dean Mar what the situation was, we were still expelled. So then the question came out, well Ray, what are you going to do? Because you're expelled you lose this semester. So I reminded them, I said I can't lose this semester because the school has shut down from March, all the grades were in from that point, this happened in April.

How do we lose this semester when the semester's been over? See during that time - -

[Crosstalk]

MN: A trimestered system?

RH: No, we were a semester. But a lot of political unrest was going on throughout a lot of the country and Wagner, as small and insignificant as it was, had students who were concerned about the war, concerned about this - -

MN: Was this the Cambodian - - time of the Cambodian invasion? What year was this?

RH: This was '70.

MN: '70; Fordham shut down in the spring of '70 because of a strike.

RH: So that's what we had. So, how do you take away a semester from twenty-seven students that has already been recorded and complete? So I told them I'm not coming back to do or redo this semester when my grades are already in. Then there's a big article in the paper, 'clemency granted Hodge.' He can graduate; he did this, he did that - - So I told my parents that the whole thing was a sham. And we wrote to the Lutheran Synod. They said there wasn't anything they could do even though it's a Lutheran affiliated school. They still have their policy and procedure that they follow, we can't step in. But to take away a semester from twenty-six students for no reason - -

MC: And that stood, they didn't revoke that?

RH: No, no it stood.

MC: Now what about the white radical group that disrupted the College Day, was there any - -?

RH: No, no, they didn't like that fact that Black Concern had occupied the administration building and brought a, a news awareness to the community because it was in the Advance. They didn't like the fact that we questioned not being advised when they were going to meet with us to put this package together. So the opportunity presented itself and they, they knew the group who had done this, but they had the opportunity now to blame it on Black Concern and to take whatever action they felt they wanted to take; and that's what they did. And that's why I said I do not have a, a good relationship with Wagner.

MN: So you never ended up getting a Wagner degree?

RH: No, I have it. And I walked in the procession. And I have my picture with the president handing me my diploma and I'm shaking his hand. And I did that because it meant a lot to my parents; I didn't do it because I believed that's what I should do. I made a compromise with my parents that day because I was involved in a softball league and we had a game. I said, 'I'll go to the graduation, but I'm going to play the game.'

Because I told them that I wasn't going to go to the graduation ceremony. But it did mean a lot to them. And the reporter who took the picture said, 'this is the first time in the four years that you've been here that I've never seen - - that I see you without a smile.'

MC: So have you been back for like induction to the Athletic Hall of Fame, or things like that?

RH: I went back for the Hall of Fame induction.

MC: When was that, was that like eighty - -

RH: No that was in the nineties. That was the second year that - - and again I told them that I'm not happy and I don't feel like coming, but it, it - - My wife wanted to go and she thought it would be good for my son to see and have an idea of what I did. But even adding to that I would've been the first African American honored Athlete of the Year at Wagner. And I didn't get it my sophomore year because they told me it's an award they give to the seniors, so my junior year when I had a better year than my sophomore year I said, 'oh, I understand it's senior - -' My senior year I'm the first ever player to be drafted in the NBA, I'm the first All-American Basketball player at Wagner. I'm the first this, first that - - They told me that the award was discontinued this year because of the political unrest on the campus, but here's your MVP trophy for basketball. So I said, 'well how can I get this if every thing's been discontinued?' One of my team - - well

teammates, he graduated when I was a sophomore petitioned for my number to be retired and they never answered him. Well it's a lot of - - its funny because in terms of the academic experience, the social experience I never had any problems with that, the athletic experience my senior year after this whole episode just changed everything. A school took, and now its time to acknowledge and give back and they said no for nonsense, that was just what it was, nonsense. And you look now the minority population at Wagner when I went might have been 3%, so now its 10%, its - - well they can say, 'well we're increasing, we're moving in a right direction,' but it's nowhere where it should be.

MN: Mark do you have any more questions?

MS: I just have a question as from your childhood, do you know what males did, do you think you could summarize those occupations?

MN: The jobs that the fathers in the Patterson were doing at that time.

RH: I would say most probably in the fields available were laborers, some might have been working for transit. I know my father started with ConEd, what he was doing I'm not sure. So whatever the big industry was at that time was where most of them probably were. I know as - - as I became older more - - I was able to identify more with the transit department, but in terms of being professionals or being in business probably, probably not.

MN: So they worked for the city, or they worked for factories or other forms of blue-collar labor.

RH: Yes.

MS: So these jobs left you're saying in the late sixties, early seventies? Which is why - - you know comparing households - - I'm trying to understand how this all takes place - -

RH: Well I think it's - - your, your households start to deteriorate, conditions around you - - I can't speak for the conditions within the household; sometimes you're just real tired of your partner, sometimes the outside influences cause you to change, maybe the pressures of maintaining that household became strong and cause you to drink more or look for some kind of substitute to occupy your time - - It's - - I know that as we got older the things that we didn't see became more visible. You had more people getting high, you had more people doing hard drugs, you had more people trying to make drug life their life, you had more people drinking, you had girls our age getting pregnant - - trying to pinpoint when and how and what is hard, but you just saw these things happening.

MN: Anything else Mark?

MC: Was there - - I'm stuck with the 6,000 males at - -

[Laughter]

RH: Dewitt Clinton.

MC: And it being an interracial, predominantly white you indicated - - Was there any particular experience that stands out in your time there at Dewitt on an interracial level, both positive and negative? - - defining moment that kind of captured your high school experience?

RH: I don't - -

MC: I don't know if you saw the Robert DeNiro film, Bronx Tale you know where there's this, you get this - -

[Crosstalk]

MN: That was set in Roosevelt, which is here.

RH: Yes, Roosevelt is this area, but - -

MC: But nothing is standing out in your memory?

RH: No.

MC: That's a good thing.

RH: Well again, at that time the high school to go to in the Bronx was Dewitt Clinton. Bronx High School of Science was just being built. So for a male who wanted to do well academically, you went to Dewitt Clinton. Now if you were a good student and a good athlete you went to Dewitt Clinton. There were, yes 6,000 young men to choose from for whatever sport you went out for, but that's where you went.

MC: Would you then attribute the lack of guidance you received to racism? Was the guidance counselor white who didn't perceive black students at Dewitt - - even though Dewitt was known for its academic background - - Would it, could it be that the guidance counselor was acting out of some kind of racist notion in failing to properly advise you to a good college potentially?

RH: That possibility is always there, and I say that because, not remembering my counselor's name, it was never presented to be that we're going beyond twelfth grade. I was never called down to say, 'Ray you're at this point you're doing well here, here and here, let's look at this college, this college, this college and get the applications out.' It very well could've been - -

MC: Did that happen for most white students do you recall? Did they receive that kind of counseling towards college preparation?

RH: See, I can't say because that's not news that - -

MC: - - you would've been privy to.

RH: Yes, yes. All I know is that I was never afforded the conversation of we're going beyond twelfth grade.

MC: Did you find it odd for a school that was known for its academic reputation?

RH: And then again, our numbers weren't that large, so it very well could've been. At the time, as liberal as everyone might have thought they were, maybe they weren't, maybe they weren't. And if you look, I'm sure if you look at Walton, which again was probably populated similarly to Dewitt - -

MN: In fact Pat Paine says Walton was almost like a private school at that time; it was really a spit and polish, very rigorous place.

RH: So I can't answer directly; all I know is that I wasn't alerted to moving on beyond twelfth grade. Maybe they were waiting for me and me not thinking about it I didn't go to them. And my parents never really presented that to me - -

MC: Because I was just interested in the racial dynamics at Dewitt High School at that time.

RH: Oh yes, my teachers - - the teachers that I had at that time were great. They encouraged, they pushed, they did what they could to get the most out of me, and I had a good experience. I know today I - - especially - - I know quite a few students who go to school in Bridgeport and they do not have the encouragement that I had. And I know a lot of teachers who work in the Bridgeport system who come from other areas of Connecticut and they're just there to get their pay check and go home. And I tell anyone that will listen to me the problem is they're not dedicated to helping those students move

beyond where they are; let's get paid and go home. And then - - unless you're in a magnet program, a college bound program, you don't have a chance, you don't have a chance. And who are the ones that don't have a chance? All of the minority students in those schools.

MC: It's been a fascinating - -

MN: Wow - -

[END OF SESSION 1]