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# Johnson, Daryl

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Interviewer: Oneka LaBennett  
Interviewee: Darryl Johson  
Transcribed By Eddie Mikus

Oneka LaBennett (OL): So today is March 8, 2008, I'm sorry, April 8, 2008. We are at Fordham University in the Department of African and African American Studies. This is part of the Bronx African-American History Project. The interviewers are myself, Dr. Oneka LaBennett, and Charlie Johnson and we have the interview today with DJ Thoro, who will state his legal name and spell it for us.

Daryl Johnson (DJ): My legal name is Darryl Johnson, which is spelled D-A-R-R-Y-L,

OL: And then J-O-H-N

DJ: J-O-H-N-S-O-N.

OL: Okay. And if could tell us when you were born.

DJ: '75, 1975.

OL: And were you born here in the Bronx?

DJ: I was actually born at Harlem Hospital—

OL. Ah. Okay

DJ: At 135<sup>th</sup> and Lennox, right there.

OL: Ah, Okay. Was your family living in Harlem at the time?

DJ: My family, my mother was living in 182<sup>nd</sup> and Norris and my father was living at 135<sup>th</sup> and Lennox.

OL: So you were taken home from the hospital, where did you go?

DJ: 182<sup>nd</sup>.

OL: And how long did you live there?

DJ: I lived there, those are the years that I couldn't, I don't remember but I know I did it. I was there, I was there, I probably was there from, like, when I was a baby until, like, three years old. Then my parents got back together, so to speak, or whatever. And my father was in the military—

OL: Oh.

DJ: So I did a lot of bouncing from New York to, like, Florida. I have a lot of family in Florida, so I did a lot back and forth from New York to Florida.

OB: Right.

DJ: It was almost, basically, like I would go to school here and then in the summer, I would go there. And then I would turn around to I would go to school there and in the summer, I would come here.

OL: I see.

DJ: So it turned, it turned into that kind of thing for a while

OL: Always going back and forth

DJ: Always going back and forth, because my father's in the military too. We also lived in Colorado Springs, but I don't remember that.

OL: What branch is father—

DJ: Army. He was in the Army.

OL: And do you have any other siblings?

DJ: Yeah, I have an older brother and I have two sisters.

OL: And when you were in the Bronx, other than that first place on 182<sup>nd</sup> and Morris, where else did you live?

DJ: Where else did I live? Well, I lived on Lennox Terrace and 135<sup>th</sup>. Basically 182<sup>nd</sup> and Morris in Manhattan and Lennox Terrace. And then I used to live on Whitlock Avenue, where the 6 Train is. I used live over there too, or whatever. So that's pretty much where I was or whatever.

OL: And what was your home life when you were here in New York versus when you were in Florida? Was it like different, did you do different things growing up? Did you have more time outside in Florida? How did you—

DJ: Florida, Florida was boring, like. There was nothing to do, like. There was just a different lifestyle, like. Like down there. Like up here, a lot of people don't even know what crickets are, believe it or not.

OL: Right

DJ: Like down there, it's more wooded areas. It's like more suburban. It's more like Long Island. That's what Florida's like. I can say one thing: It kept me out of a lot of trouble because at that time, there was a lot of bad things going on. It's not like it

used to be, like it was real bad in certain areas, especially in the Bronx and Harlem. It was bad at the time, so...That was the whole reason my mother was like, "You're going to go here this summer, you're going to back." That's why I did a lot of back and forth or whatever. You're going to go stay here, you going to do this, you're going to do that, because I guess she was trying to shelter me from the [unclear].

OL: Had you older brother been getting into trouble, or had you been getting into trouble, that she was going to send you—

DJ: Nope. Actually, my older brother, he never really got into a lot of trouble. My older brother, they called him "Karate Reg" because he does karate, like literally. He's, like, a sixth-degree black belt—

OL: Wow.

DJ: He's been doing it he's like 43 years old, he's been doing it his whole life. That was something I just never got into. But he used to always beat me up, like, to the point where I would cry. Like that was how he would beat me up. If I didn't cry, he's not going to stop beating me, so he'll beat me until I cry. Even if it didn't hurt, I just had to sit there and fake like I was crying—

OL: He got the job done.

DJ: He got the job done. But I came from a good family. You know, like I said, my father was in the military. My mother, she had her own business. She used to do hair. She was a cosmetologist, so I came from a functional family, not a dysfunctional family. So they instilled family values and things like that, which I still carry to this day or whatever. So I grew up pretty good. I can't complain.

Charlie Johnson (CJ): Was music in your household a lot?

DJ: Oh yeah.

CJ: What kind of music was in your house?

DJ: The music I grew up on was like Marvin Gaye, Easley Brothers, Al Green, Commodores, James Brown of course, Joe Tex. My father was into a lot of jazz like Theolonius Monk, Herbie Hancock, Leonard Ferguson, and what else? Bob James. And ironically, all of those groups that I'm naming is actually what hip-hop came out of.

OL: Oh, definitely.

DJ: Because that's what, you know, when I was little, I could never go to the park jams, but my brother could go and he would bring these tapes back. Like, this was actually how I got into it, I was too young to go anywhere so my brother, he would

go to 123 Park, 118 Park, Echo Park, all those jams in the Bronx because he's much older than me. So he would come back with these tapes and he would play them, and I was like, even at a young age, I was, like fascinated with just, I don't know [filler words]. I think it's truly a God given, like, talent or whatever. Immediately, as soon as I heard that, I was, like, mesmerized. Like how are they doing that? I would hear the [simulates hip-hop sound effect] and I would think, "How do they do that?" I would sit there and stare at the speakers and then every time I would hear those tapes, I remember, I would imagine what it would look like out there, like what was going on. Because he was telling me, "They're on the mic doing this," they used to call it going off. The immediate term, what they're calling is now, is breaking. Back then it was called going off, or they would call it beat boys, because they would only break on the part of the record which known as the break, so they would call it going off. So at that time, I didn't know what he was talking about, because I never saw it, but he used to always tell me about it, so I would sit there and imagine what was going on and just try to envision what he was telling me. So that's basically, that's really the first time I ever heard hip-hop. I was so young, but I still remember it. I was probably like four or five, literally. It like, maybe, was '79, something like that, when I first heard it. Actually, the first record I heard was on the radio was sequence called "Funk you up," and then the next record, everyone knows it, ah, I'm having a blackout right now,

CJ: Rapper's Delight.

OL: Of course. Oh year.

DJ: Oh yeah. Rapper's Delight. That one. That was the first mainstream record, but I had already heard stuff from tapes, you know, from dudes like Fantastic Romantic Freaks, Cold Crush, Grandmaster Cash—

OL: Oh yeah.

DJ: Melly Mel. People like that. Africa Bambata, Cool Hurt, you know, people like that. And, to this day, I still have tapes that are older than me. I still have those tapes.

OL: Wow. You kept the tapes. Wow.

DJ: Yeah, I kept the tapes. I still have tapes.

OL: Well, I definitely want to hear more about the music, but I want to sort of get the foundation of how you got there. So when your brother was going off to those park jams and you were too young and staying home, who were you, when you were out of the house, who were you hanging out with? Where did you go to school?

DJ: Oh OK. Well, I had friends that I hanged out with. I used to go to PS 41 on [unclear] Road. I went there I went to Cardinal Hayes for a while. And like I said, I

went to school in Florida too. There was a school there called Henry F. Kite. I went there. And, I have to tell you this too, but there's a DJ here named Jazzy J or whatever, and he's was born in the Bronx, but he was born in South Carolina. And he used to actually live in Florida where I used to live at.

OL: Oh wow.

DJ: So, and, in Jacksonville, Florida. I used to live there too. So he used to actually live there too, and I know some of his, you know, like relatives or whatever, personally or whatever. There was always, I don't know, for some reason, a lot of people don't know, there was always like a connection with the South and up North because it extends back to, like slavery, if you will. Because a lot of people from down south—

OL: Came North.

DJ: Came North. So you have a lot of family—

OL: Definitely. Yeah.

DJ: You know, you know from there. So, because honestly, a lot of people that are from New York are technically not from New York. And he wasn't really born here but they were raised here. So you have a lot of people, it's just funny like that.

OL: Yeah. Since you brought it up, when you were hearing all this great music in New York and then you were going to Florida, were you playing it for your cousins or your relatives down there?

DJ: Yeah, that was like bragging rights. Because I was always like, the kid from New York, so I dressed different, you know. [Filler]. We used to wear the Shell Toe Adidas, the creases, the pinstripes leaves—

OL: You have to press them.

DJ: Yeah, you have to press them. I used to iron my shoestrings. You know, we used to have the bomber jacket, so right away anybody from up north, when they come down south, anywhere in the world, I don't think a lot of New Yorkers realize that. We have, we used to have our own unique style. It used to be that you would look at a person and tell where they were from.

OL: Oh yeah.

DJ: Like I used to look at people and be like, "He's from Cali, he's from down South, he's from New York" just by the way they dress. It's not like that no more. It's not like that anymore.

OL: That's true.

DJ: The only way you could tell where somebody is from now is by the way they talk.  
OL: Right.

DJ: Not the way they dress. How they dress is the same now.

OL: That's true, that's true.

DJ: So yeah, but when I was down there, I was always known as the kid from New York who had all the tapes. I would always brag, "Yeah, I got this, you don't know about this, you don't know nothing about this, whatever." Because down there, they used to listen to, at that time they used to listen to a lot of, what's called "miney-based."

CJ: House music.

DJ: Like house music. And they didn't know, obviously, they wasn't into it. So I used to pride myself on bringing these tapes down there—

OL: Sure.

DJ: And like, all my friends, I would, you know I would try to make copies of them and try to turn them on to it. Like, this is what's going on, this is what's happening. So I kind of created a little culture down there of people just having a different appreciation for music from a place where they've never been or never even heard of or whatever.

OL: And around what age did you start doing that?

DJ: I was like around, like maybe, 11, 12, 13, something like that.

OL: OK. So we're talking early '80's.

DJ: Early, yeah, early. Something like that. This was real early. This was before B-Street came out, before Wild Style came out, Style Wars, like around that era.

OL: OK. So back to the Bronx, what I'd like to know is what the neighborhood was like. You said your mom was worried about you getting in trouble—

DJ: Right.

OL: When you're out of the house, did you play on the sidewalk with other kids? What was the neighborhood like?

DJ: As far as, being in the Bronx, I grew up around Spanish. Spanish and black, that's basically what it was. It's basically like anywhere else until today, you know. You played with the fire hydrant. There's nowhere to play, play on the sidewalk or the little park on the corner, but back then, there's a lot of dope fiends and stuff, so there used to be a lot of syringes, so my mother never wanted me to go to the park.

OL: Sure.

DJ: Because, literally, you could fall and land on a syringe. So it's crazy, but—

OL: Do you remember what streets you were playing on or around where you were?

DJ: What is it? Mostly 182<sup>nd</sup>, Morris—

OL: OK. So still around there.

DJ: Just in that area or whatever, up to Jerome Avenue where the 4 Train is. Just in that area. I couldn't really go anywhere, like my mother, she didn't play that, she wouldn't allow that.

CJ: Your mother was pretty strict?

DJ: Yeah, yeah. I couldn't go anywhere. Like, I literally, I really, I literally grew up with people that never left the block. If you don't believe that, I'm dead serious—

OL: Oh yeah, I believe it.

DJ: Like literally, their whole teenage years, they never went anywhere. Never

OL: Sure.

DJ: Like I know people that never went to Manhattan. Ever. Until they got old.

OL: I believe it.

DJ: It's crazy.

OL: So what was the...you said there were black and Latino kids. Did you have friends who were Latino?

DJ: Of course. I mean the whole building was black and Latino. Actually, it still is today.

OL: Do you remember hearing any Latin music when you were growing up?



DJ: Yeah, I used to listen to a lot of Latin music. Yeah, like Tino Puente I used to listen to. There's this guy from Brazil called Garcon King Combo. I listened to him. As a matter of fact, there's a record out there. It's one of his records. If you look on the record, it says, "Schoolyard Bricks" and on the back you see "Garcon King Combo." That used to be one of the mystery breaks that Jazzy J Cool heard.

OL: OK.

DJ: [Unclear] because the musical knowledge is so diverse. That's why I say hip-hop comes from soca, calypso, reggae, doo-wop, everything. It's all mixed into one. So a lot of those break records, those artists are not even, quote-unquote, American. It's just totally generic music, but there's these little, for whatever reason, a lot of records between '73 and '81, for whatever reason, the bands always played a break. Like, for whatever reason, like—

OL: Right.

DJ: I don't know what that was—

CJ: They always did 30-second beat sounds.

DJ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They always get a drummer or soul. Always. For whatever reason. And that's kind of, that literally how hip-hop developed.

OL: Yeah.

CJ: Extending those breaks and mixing them—

DJ: Extending those breaks, yeah. So listened to a lot of Spanish music, as I still do today or whatever. A lot of the music that I listen to as far as Spanish wise, I, like, I don't necessarily know the name of the artist, but I just love music so much I'll just pick up stuff and listen to it—

OL: Sure.

DJ: Which kids don't do no more today. They've got to who the artist is. Back then, you just picked it up and listen. You had to love music-

OL: Sure. You can download three minutes of it—

DJ: You can download anything. You just, like, you can go to the record store and like, let me try this. That's how it was, and that how was even when, like, in the late '80s when I was listening to a lot of hip-hop. That how I [unclear] about Lords of Finance and Bismarcky, all of these people. I never heard of them. I just used to see their records, and I would buy them and listen to them like that. But my musical knowledge is like, because my mother, she used to listen to a lot of, like I said, jazz,

funk, R & B, reggae. I think I pretty much grew up on everything, literally, except country music. I didn't listen. I don't like country.

CJ: Did you have any, like, formally trained musicians in your family? Did anyone play any instruments?

DJ: No, nobody ever played any instruments in my family. I think my sister tried to play the trumpet once, but that was about it. But nobody—

CJ: Was anybody like a performer or an entertainer somehow?

DJ: In my family, no. All my, all my cousins, like, I had a lot of cousins too, but, as I said, like, at the time, in that area there was a lot of drugs and the situation [unclear]. So a lot of my cousins, they were, how do you call it, they were bound, headed for greatness, but they got caught up into drugs and got killed and they went to jail. So my mother, I guess, that's why my mother never wanted me to go anywhere—

OL: Sure.

DJ: Because I had a cousin. His name was Lamar. He was one of the top high school players in the country. He was like, getting ready to get drafted. But he had a drug problem—

OL: Wow...

DJ: Which just destroyed him. He never made it. So—

OB: Yeah, definitely.

DJ: So my mother, she would always tell me, she didn't want me to hang, and I always used to hang out with him. Believe it or not, I would hang out with him while he was doing drugs. And he used to offer me—

OL: And how old were you then?

DJ: I was young. I was like 10 years old.

OL: Wow.

DJ: I was, like 10 10. He was much older than me. He was in high school then, like 16 or 17. Something like. No, he was, like 17 or 18, no he was like, he was 17. And I always used to hang with him, and he would smoke weed. He would go to baseball practice and he'd be sitting there in the dugout smoking weed, and he'd be like, "Here," and I'd be like. Nobody had to tell me not to do that. I just—

OL: You knew.

DJ: My mother never gave me a drug awareness speech, like, "Don't do this or don't do that." Like, I just knew, "I don't want to do that." Like I never wanted to do that. I used to get in fights because people wanted me to do drugs—

OL: Wow

DJ: And I would never want to do it. Like literally. People would call me a punk, a faggot, a sissy, I'm soft, and I would have to fight.

OL: Yeah. You were interested in music, you weren't interested in—

DJ: I didn't want, I just, I don't know. Even to this day, believe or not, I've never had a drink or smoked anything in my life.

OL: Wow.

DJ: Never. I don't drink alcohol. Never. A lot of people don't believe that, but—

OL: No, I believe that you. Why would you say it, right?

DJ: I've never had a drink of alcohol or anything or smoked anything ever. Smoked cigarettes, weed, nothing. I just, I don't know. And nobody taught me that. It's just

OL: It's just who you are.

DJ: It's just who I am. I don't know.

OL: So how did you transition from your older going to these park jams, bringing back these tapes? How did you start wanting to do what you heard on those tapes.

DJ: OK. Good question. My brother, also, when he heard those jams, he called himself being a DJ too or whatever.

OL: OK.

DJ: So, it's almost like the same story. I'm pretty sure that everyone has this sort of same story, you know. Back then, everybody had phonographs, which is turntables.

OL: OK. Yep

CJ: What was your first pair?

DJ: Which was actually my parents' turntables, which was actually just one. Of course, when my mother would go to work and my father would leave, of course I

would play his records. [Laughter]. And I would just mimic that. Me and my brother, we would basically tear up my father's stuff or whatever. We didn't know what we were doing or whatever. I used to get a lot of beatings for that, too.

OL: Yep.

DJ: Like, playing with his records. He used to say, "Don't mess with my records." But he didn't say "mess with." He said, "Don't mess with my records." But I had to, I would play them and then I would still try to mimic what I was hearing. So that's literally how it started. My love for hip-hop came from those tapes. That was actually the point when I first heard those tapes. That's not when I decided what I wanted to do—

OL: OK

DJ: But I was always into music, always into music. What I used, what I wanted to do is I wanted to be a football player, because I played a lot of football or whatever. I used to like baseball. That's what I really wanted to do, but I don't know, it didn't pan out that way.

OL: How did you do in school growing up?

DJ: School? I just got by. I'm not even going to lie.

OL: OK. Yeah.

DJ: I barely got by. I just did enough to get by. Like literally, I was just—

OL: Were there any music programs in your school growing up?

DJ: Yeah, I took music programs like, but I didn't learn anything.

OL: Like in elementary or junior high?

DJ: In junior high and high school, but I didn't learn anything. I didn't learn anything, honestly?

OL: Did you ever get involved in the band or anything like that?

DJ: I never, I used to want to play drums, but even like music, see they, the way they teach music, they want you to learn how to read it. A lot of the greatest musicians in the world, they don't know how to read music. I guess I'm lazy. I didn't want to learn. I liked to play by ear, as I do today, like I do beats. I can't play a piano, I can't play anything. But if you put it on a keyboard, if you put it on a drum pad, I can play it. But if you put it on a piano, I can't play. But if it's on a pad, I'll just play it by ear until I get it. Like that. One hand, you can't play piano. So that's how, really, that was

basically my music lesson or whatever. I took music in high school, but I didn't learn anything, because I didn't want to, basically.

OL: Okay. So when did you start deciding that you were going to do this? You were going to try and make this, other than, you started playing with your Dad's turntable. What came next?

DJ: This is, like on a radio, this was really where I made the second transition from...On the radio, there was a DJ called Red Alert. DJ Red Alert—

OL: Oh yeah.

DJ: And Maulie Maul. I think Red came on the Radio for the first time, I think it was around '83, '84, it was Red Alert, he was on KISS FM, and then Maulie Maul was on WBLS. And there used to also be this group called, these DJs called the Latin Rascals—

OL: Oh yeah. I remember all of these guys.

DJ: Oh yeah? [Laughs]. So that was actually '84. I still have those tapes too, by the way. I used listen to the radio ever, they used to have this thing called the Rap Attack. Maulie Maul Rap Attack. It would come on at 9 o'clock, Friday and Saturday. That was my highlight. I had the tape, you know, put the tissue in the tape. I used sit by the radio and record the radio every Friday, Saturday.

OL: I did the same thing. You had to press play really fast, play and record at the same time.

DJ: Right. So I had two, we had two stereos in the house. So, you know, they came on at the same time. Red Alert and Maulie Maul would be on at the same time.

OL: Right. So you had to get both.

DJ: So I would record KISS FM and I would be recording [stutters]

OL: WBLS?

DJ: Yeah, WBLS. And I would always try to edit my tapes because I don't have the commercials, so—

OL: Right.

DJ: So I'd pause the commercial.

OL: And you had to be on point.

DJ: Yeah [laughter]. You had to guess when the music...So that right there, I could honestly tell you I'm a DJ because of Maulie Maul and Red Alert. That did it, like, because that, they took it to a new level, like because now I hear it more frequently and I know when it's going to come on, so I study it a little better. I still didn't know how they were doing it because I had never seen anybody actually, like, DJ. I actually taught myself how to DJ from these tapes. Because I would record these tapes and I would play them, and I would just try to mimic what I was hearing. Like, "How is he doing that?" Nobody ever taught me how to DJ.

OL: Wow.

DJ: That's how I learned. From those, Maulie Maul. Indirectly, Maulie Maul taught me how to DJ because of the tapes I recorded from him from the radio and I would play them back over and over. And I would just try to mimic what I was hearing. Like, I would try to get the same records. Like he would play, "Hold It Now" from Beastie Boys. So I would get that record, and I would try to do the same thing until I got it, like, until I just figured out, "How is he doing that."

OL: Wow.

DJ: And that is how learned. Nobody ever showed me. Nobody ever came in and showed me and said, "Look. Do this. Do it like that." It would have made it much easier, because I teach people today. They bypass what I had to go through and I just show them how to do it. Nobody ever showed me how to do it. It took me a long time just to learn the simplest things because I had never actually saw—

OL: Seen it. Right

DJ: And then when I saw it, I was like, "Oh, that's easy." Yeah, it was frustrating. I used to tear up a lot of—[Laughter]. But that's how I learned. I always wanted to tell Red Alert that too. I've met Red Alert a million times, but I've never told him—

OL: That you're—  
because o

DJ: That I'm DJing because of you. Like I studied you—

OL: Wow.

DJ: Like you have no idea. But that's basically how I got into DJing. But even at that point, I learned how to DJ but I still wasn't considering myself, well even you know, like trying to be a DJ like that.

CJ: It was more a hobby?

DJ: Yeah, it was more of a hobby. I was just, I never thought I could, I never really thought I could do it. Because, see fortunately at that time, unfortunately at that time, you had to have a lot of skill to be a DJ. Back then, DJing was about cutting, scratching. You had to know how to do that.

CJ: No computers.

DJ: No computers. You had to know how to that, and that means you had to know music because you had to literally sit there and find these breaks and what not. You had to know how to do it. So that's why I was always intimidated, like "I'm never going to be that good or whatever." But I just stuck with it and I just kept developing and developing and developing and developing, and it got to a point where I was so good, I didn't know how good I was because I had never, ever spent for anybody in my life, a crowd or anything. Actually, my first, my first party, my first DJ party was, believe it or not, maybe like '92—

OL: Wow. Wow. So this was a solitary exercise that you were doing?

DJ: Yeah, yeah. I was just, I was just doing it. My first actual party was, like, '92. I used to tell people, "Oh, I do this." You always try to make yourself bigger than you are. Like, "Oh yeah, I did this, I did that"

OL: [Laughter]

DJ: "I DJed for this person," but I never did. But I would tell them than, and they would put me on the spot and I lived up to it. Like I just—

CJ: So your first time went well.

DJ: Yeah, my first time went well, very well.

OL: In the time you were doing that alone, did you know any other kids at school who were doing this, or other—

DJ: Yeah, I had this guy named Marcel. He was actually better than me. HE actually stuck with it because, at that time, he had went to school in Tampa, something, and was down there DJing or whatever, and he used to always send me tapes or whatever, and I was like, "Wow, that guy's good." And I kind of like got intimidated because I just like stopped doing. One thing about DJing, though, is that when you stop doing it, you still know how to do it, you just only know what you did when you stopped. That's the only thing, that's as far as you're going to go.

OL: It stays with you.

DJ: It stays with you. It's like riding a bike. You still know how to ride a bike, but you don't know anything more than you used to know. You know what you know, but

that's about it. But he had got real good or whatever, and he had sent me tapes, and that kind of got me back into it or whatever. That's how I really started taking it serious, because I wasn't, I never was trying to be DJ. I wanted to be a DJ, I always knew that whatever I did, it was going to be some type of sport or I was going to do something. I knew I wasn't going to work a 9-to-5, let's put it that way. I always knew that, even though my mother disagreed with me.

OL: Right.

DJ: Because I did work a 9-to-5. I always knew I wasn't going to be working on a 9-to-5 for a living. Like I've worked at the post office and UPS at the same time. Those were the only two jobs I've ever had. And, that's what I stopped to do—

CJ: When you started DJing, was it mostly house parties or what type of—

DJ: Yeah, mostly house parties.

CJ: Just someone would ask you to come over Friday night?

DJ: Yeah, it was like house parties. It was mostly house parties and just DJing with each other in the house.

CJ: Like some of your friends would get together—

DJ: Yeah, like not even a party. Just a little get-together, like not even a flyer or whatever it was.

OL: This was in the early nineties?

DJ: Yeah, in the early, early, nineties.

CJ: What kind of equipment did you start out with, because I started out with a lot of broke turntables.

DJ: I had the [unclear] turntables, but they were—

CJ: Bell-dry.

DJ: The bell-dry, yeah. So you had to put a lot of paper under the record so you don't have any resistance or whatever. So those are what I really started off on. And I started off on, I don't even know what they're called, but you know those turntables where the radio, it has the radio connected to it? And the turntable sits on top?

OL: Yeah, I know what you're talking about.



CJ: Yeah, I had one of those.

DJ: So I had one of those, and the regular techniques, or whatever.

CJ: What kind of mixer?

DJ: I had a cheap—

CJ: RadioShack?

DJ: RadioShack, General Edition. Not even a cross-reader. Up and down. It had the up and down to two channels, like this is the right, I mean this is the right and this is the left. So you have to mix like that. So when you're bringing this record on, you have to take this one off, you have to mix like that.

CJ: Yeah.

DJ: That's how I used to mix. Just like that.

CJ: How long did it take you to spend on those? Because I know for a lot of DJs that I've met, including myself, it really becomes serious when you invest that money into the techniques, 1200s. So when did you make that transition and how long were you on those turntables?

DJ: I was on those turntables, like, [stuttering], my parents, they always thought what I was doing, when I started getting serious about it, that it was a waste of time. You going to college, you're going to school. Like, you're not sitting around here doing this, because that's all I used to do. It got to a point where that's all I did, so my father would be like, "Where are you going to school? Are getting a job?" Telling you, "You're doing this, you're doing that." I lost my train of thought.

OL: He was asking about how much, when you decided to spend money on—

DJ: Oh yeah. So what happened was, I would ask my parents to buy me turntables. This is one of the reasons why I got a job, because they wouldn't support me—

CJ: Give you money for it.

DJ: Like I love my mother to death, but she would never support it, my music, until she saw, "Oh wow." Same thing with my father. They would never support it. Ever. It was always like, "You're wasting your time. This is [unclear]" which I'm sure a lot of parents did. Because, at that time, stuff was still being invented, like hip-hop—

OL: Sure

DJ: I think now, there's nothing else to invent.

OL: So this was something uncertain for your parents.

DJ: Right., right. Nobody had ever made a living doing this, they didn't know. I didn't know, I didn't care, it was just something I loved to do. So, when I started getting serious was, you know, when I got my first pair of real Techni-12 turntables, Techni-1200s, I was walking down Lennox Avenue, and a crackhead was pulling a cart, a wagon, what do you call it?

OL: A shopping cart?

DJ: No, not a shopping cart. What do you call—?

CJ: Like a little red wagon?

DJ: Little red, what do you call those things?

OL: Like a red wagon?

DJ: That the kids sit in? He was pulling one of those, and he had speakers and two Techni-1200s.

OL: [Laughter]

DJ: I swear. And I said, "Come here. What are you doing with that?" He was a crackhead. And he was like, I was like, "What do you want for that?" He said, "Give me \$75 for everything." And I was like, "Seventy-five dollars."

OL: Wow.

DJ: He had speakers and Techni-1200s. Two. So I'm looking at it, and it was brand-new. And I'm like, "Where the hell did you get this from?" So we like, "Ah, whatever, whatever." So I'm like looking at the stuff and I bought it. And that's when—

CJ: And they worked and everything?

OL: That's amazing.

DJ: They worked. Everything was perfect. I went to the community center, this was on 35<sup>th</sup> and Lennox, I went to the community center to plug it up, to see if everything worked, everything worked. So I bought them. That's how I got serious.

CJ: What year was that?

DJ: That was like, what year was that? That was, like, '93. Like '93. That was when I really got serious. That when [unclear] was out, who else? EPMD, Black Moon had just came out, Tribe [unclear]. That was that era.

CJ: That's a little before my time. I was born in '87.

DJ: [Stuttering] That was that era. So I bought them and then I really got serious. Because at that time, as I told you, it was all about—

CJ: The skills.

DJ: The skills. So you needed those turntables to do certain things. So I was just so good on the piece of crap equipment that I had, that when I got those, it was like clockwork. Like, things I was trying, like the biggest thing when doing cuts and tricks is the needle-jumping. But, well, I had developed a steady hand even when I had the raggedy turntables, so when I touched those, it was like, "Wow."

OL: That was easy.

DJ: I couldn't believe I could do that. I was like, "Oh, I could do it." It was easy. I was like, "Wow, that was it. That's another thing, too. When you're learning stuff [stuttering], you've got to go ahead and get the equipment, because it makes it that much easier. If you're trying to learn on something that's not designed to do what you're doing, you know. So I really got serious about DJing in '93. I was serious about DJing, but I wasn't doing it for a living. I still was just doing it So I just, at that time, I was just DJing for fun. It was just a hobby or whatever. So that's basically—

OL: You said before that you would go to these house parties, just people getting together. Where, in what neighborhoods, were you traveling to other neighborhoods to get to these parties? I want to know everything about them.

DJ: Well yeah. I used to have friends. Like I said, I used to go to a lot of people's homes in Harlem, I would go to, in the Bronx. I used to go to, like, Skatekey, you know, places like that. But not to DJ, but—

OL: Just to hang out?

DJ: Just to hang out or whatever.

CJ: Any DJs?

DJ: Huh?

CJ: With other DJs or just friends?

DJ: Yeah, with other DJs or whatever. I kind of surrounded myself with people who only had my interests, the same interests as me. I never really hang out with people who didn't have the same the interests as me. So I had a lot of friends, but not a lot of people that I hanged around with. I only hanged around with people, I got to the

point where, if you wasn't into music, I didn't even want to hang around you. Female, too, like. You're not even into music, I don't know what they're playing or whatever. I would go to different house parties in the Bronx or in Harlem or whatever. Like just friends' house, back and forth like that. Nothing major, or whatever. Because I never really, really went out to clubs until like, late, mid '90s. I never used to go out a lot, I always used to stay. That's what I do today. Even though I DJ, I don't go out unless I'm going—

CJ: To DJ

DJ: To Dj

OL: Sure, sure you don't like hanging out.

DJ: Sure. I don't like hanging out. Not sure why, I just don't like it. I don't know why.

OL: When you actually started working, then, I'm going to open the door because it's hot in here—when you actually started working, where were you? In people's house parties or in clubs?

CJ: And how much did you get paid?

DJ: That's a good question. My first DJ gig, there was a Spanish artist named Elsie Muñoz. Not sure if you've ever heard of here. She's from, she's from Philly. She was signed to, who was she signed to? This was '98, this was my turning point. I think she was on J-Records. I can't even remember. She was one of those artists who had a deal but never came out, like, there's a thousand artists like that. Like she had a record deal, but she never came up. Well, I used to DJ for her. I knew her husband, Tito. His name was Tito or whatever. She was from Philly but they used to live in Miami, but I met him here or whatever. So, he was like, "My wife is singing." I had never met her. And he was like, "Yeah, she's singing and I want to incorporate the Spanish." Because she was Spanish, she was Spanish R&B artist. Sort of like J-Lo. She was supposed to be J-Lo, put it that way—

OL: Right, right.

DJ: Before J-Lo came out. Literally. No, seriously. She was supposed to be J-Lo. I don't know what happened. She was good. Maybe if you Google her, it will come up.

OL: How do you spell her last name?

DJ: M-U-N-E-Z.

OL: Okay.

DJ: Maybe if you Google her, it will come up, but her name was Elsie Muñoz. Yeah, she's supposed to be the J-Lo or whatever. So anyways, I can't remember what label she was on, I want to say J-Records, I'm pretty sure it was J-Records. Anyway, he asked to DJ for her. And I was like, "What do you want me to do? She sings R&B." And he was like, "Yeah, but I want you to incorporate hip-hop, beats, like maybe she could sing over some stuff you do live or whatever. So, he was like, "just put together a show or whatever." And—

OL: Like Lisa-Lise or Cold Jam?

DJ: Yeah. I was like, "Let me hear her music or whatever." So he let me hear the music. So what I did was, at the time, this was the exact era. Remember Mobb Deep? What's the song? [Simulates song tune].

OL: Oh yeah.

DJ: That's exactly what she was...What year was that? I can't remember.

CJ: '99.

DJ: '99, yeah, '9. Right. That's when she came out. That song was, that, like, was the hot song in New York, so. She had the song called, "It Can Be Everything" or something. So, and Foxy Brown's Brother was rapping. His name is Pretty Boy. I don't if you've ever heard of Pretty Boy. But yeah, it's Foxy Brown's brother. His name is Pretty Boy. He used to have a record deal, too. He used to be on J-Records too. He was on the song. You know how the R&B signers rap and sing, and then the rapper comes in. So they were basically introducing both of them, and his name was pretty boy, so. There's a part of the record where he'd come on rapping, so on that part, when he gets ready to rap, I cut up the Quiet Storm [inaudible]. So I started cutting up the quiet storm break, and they loved it. So I got the job. That was my first job. My first job, I loved it and I think they gave me \$1000 to DJ or whatever.

OL: So they recorded that?

DJ: They recorded that

OL: Oh wow, OK.

DJ: They recorded that, it's recorded. And the first show we did was the Rock Steady Crew anniversary at Pier, what's that, what pier was that, 18, 72—

OL: 17?

DJ: 17. One of them on the West Side Highway. That the first show, I had.

CJ: That was your first major performance.

DJ: That was our major performance.

OL: Wow

CJ: Was for Rock Steady.

DJ: Was for Rock Steady. And, at that time, the beat I just came out with [simulates music]—remember that—[simulates music]

OL: Yeah

DJ: That was—

CJ: That was a lot of pressure because you've really got to be at the top of your senses to perform with the B-Boys.

DJ: Right. So that was the first show I had ever done. Before she even performed, I was like DJing or whatever. But I was always like, when I heard I was going to do that for Rock Stead, I already knew I was going to kill it because I already ready knew, I knew their history just from being around and I knew what kind of music they like. I know what they break to, I know what they dance to, so I had all break-b records. And nobody knew who I was, obviously. So I'm playing these records and I'm killing them, and the crowd is like "Ahhhhh." That was like a rush for me, to see like Crazy Legs idolize, like, you don't understand Crazy Legs. He was like a God to me. I used to want to be like him

OL: Wow.

DJ: I literally wanted to be Crazy Legs. I kind of thought I was Crazy Legs at one point, for real. So to see him getting excited for what I'm doing—

CJ: There's the reason

DJ: There's the reason that I'm doing it. Like, that was it for me. That was a turning point for me, right there.

OL: You were, now you knew what you wanted to do this

DJ: And my brother, my older brother was there too. So he was, like, patting me on the head, like "Good job." Because he never knew either. So that was like the turning point, that Rock Steady anniversary. It was like '98, '98, one of them, '99, I can't remember.

CJ: Was it held in that park on—

DJ: No, it was at the pier.

OL: At Pier 17. They have performances there.

DJ: It was at the pier, like right on the water.

OL: I know what you are talking about. It's like a mall, and there are restaurants, and you can go outside with awinings.

DJ: It was, like, outside, and it was right there. And they had the turntables set up and there was some little thing, enclosure or whatever. It was covered up. It was right there. That was my first time ever.

OL: That's amazing.

DJ: And after that, I just kept at it, and bounced around, and bounced around. But from her, her career didn't last long because I think she got dropped and then she got pregnant and she fell off. So, at that point, you know, just from DJing, we would do shows in New York. We never went anywhere else out of New York. We always did clubs around New York. Always. So every time I would do these clubs, I would get the promoter's contact, because they would see that I could DJ. So, there, from that, I started DJing this place called Cathy De Ville on Thirteenth Street and Third Avenue. I used to DJ there every Friday, I'm sorry, every Saturday. And then I used to DJ Lot 61 on Saturdays. And then, I used to DJ Club MV.

CJ: Was it just you, or did you have a whole crew of DJs?

DJ: It was just me.

CJ: OK.

DJ: It was just me. I had a crew of people that I DJed with, but when I do my thing, it's just me or whatever.

OL: When did you start calling yourself DJ Thoro?

DJ: I'm usually, I'm glad that you said that. I was actually called Thoro before I got into DJing. My mother used to call me Thoro because, like I said, I used to play a lot of sports. So I was good at football, baseball, and basketball. So they used to say, "You're thorough" so I just kept that name. So when I DJed—

OL: Right.

DJ: It's kind of embarrassing, but my first DJ name was DJ DJ, because that's—

OL: Darryl Johnson [Laughter]

DJ: That was my very first DJ name. And you know what's funny? I still have the very first mix tape which I attempted to do. It's from a tape deck turntable. Still a bunch of plays. But that was my first DJ name, DJ DJ. I was like, "That's stupid, that's corny, DJ DJ." I was like, "Ah." And then I started calling myself DJ Sample, because I used to like to sample a lot. But I was like, "Nah." That just didn't stick, so... People used to always call me Thorough anyway, so I had a kid, he was from [stuttering] Co-op City. His name was A-Wax. He used to be in a group called Live And Direct, but they never came out. They had a record deal too. But he was like, "Why don't you call yourself Thoro? You're Thoro." Because even with the music at the time, I used to write graffiti—

OL: OK.

DJ: I used to write graffiti, and, I don't want to say that I could rap, but I used to rap and I used to break dance.

OL: OK. You can tell us about all of that too.

DJ: And DJ. So it was like, "You're thorough. You everything." So he was like, "Call yourself Thoro." So that was like, he kind of made me call myself that. It was always there, but he was like "You do everything. You do this, you that. You're thorough." So that's it just stuck with me.

OL: So it came after the name your mom gave you.

DJ: Right. Exactly. And I didn't really start calling myself Thoro until, it was late ninety, when was that? It was ninety--? Because even when I did that for a show, I didn't really have a name.

CJ: You were just doing it.

DJ: I was just doing it. But when he was like, "You need to be doing this," that was when I decided that I am going to be DJ Thoro now. It was just like that. I had to have a name. I couldn't just be, "Who are you? Darryl. Huh." You have to be somebody, so that is how that played out.

OL: So tell us about the graffiti art and [unclear] and rapping?

DJ: Well, I was never, like, painting on the trains or whatever—

OL: OK.

DJ: But I used to go where you could see it.

CJ: Did you write "Thoro?"



DJ: Nah, I used to write “Strings.”

CJ: Was it like scabs or like bombs or—

DJ: It was like bombs [unclear]. I used to just, I used to, mostly my graffiti was in my little black book. I never really went around, tagging, painting on the train. I never did it. I used to want to do it, but I never did it. I used to always admire it, just seeing it on the train or whatever. But, but I could do it. Like I’ve done walls, like legal walls and things like that, but I have never painted on a train in my life. Never. Of course, everybody’s marked the inside of train before, but I never did a burner or went to the yard or [simulates sound]. Never did that. But I still have my little black books or scrapbooks, you know, my little graffiti. I’m a pretty good artist if I must say so myself, so I could always do it. I just never did it on the trains or on the walls.

OL: Right, well your mom wasn’t going to let you out of the house to do that.

DJ: So I used to take art class too. So I actually had an art scholarship to the Art Institute. That’s what my mother wanted me to be, an artist. Even to this day, she still says that, like, I should have gone to art school because I had a scholarship and I didn’t go. So, and then you know, like you say about the breaking, that just came from being in New York. Like everybody—

OL: Everybody did it.

DJ: Everybody did it. And I was pretty good. We had a little crew called the “Funky Fresh Breakers” so—

OL: [Laughter] Of course.

DJ: That was the name of my crew. I was pretty good, but I wasn’t like—

CJ: Did you guys go to a YMCA or some type of community center or was it more just outside—

DJ: Yeah, you know, you go to the community center on the corner with the cardboard, the park, it was nothing, like major. I think everybody at that time did it. How could you not do it? At least try to do that or something. Anything. Like, in every aspect of hip-hop, I’ve dabbled in it.

CJ: That’s what I’ve found. A lot of people, if they’re good at one of the elements of hip-hop, they usually have done another element or they’re good at something—

DJ: Right, right, right. Like the DJing, breaking, graffiti, even the rapping. Like, I used to rap. I used to rap before I started DJing.

OL: OK.

CJ: Did you have a rap name?

DJ: Never had a rap name. Never had a rap name. But I'm like [laughter]. Nah, my rap name was Metaphor, because I used to use a lot of—

OL: That's a good name.

DJ: Yeah, I used to use a lot of metaphors. But there were so many rappers out, I was like, "I'm not going to make it rapping, because there's too many." So I just, eh. I can still write, but—

OL: So did you have a notebook of rhymes, where you—

DJ: Yeah, I had a garbage bag full of rhymes. Like literally, I had a garbage bag full of rhymes that I had thought of.

OL: Wow. So how old were you then?

DJ: I started rapping when Rapper's Delight started coming out.

OL: So you were young.

DJ: Like I started, the way I started rapping is I would listen to the raps and write those raps down and recite those raps. But then I would do the same raps and I would change it.

OL: Change the lyrics.

DJ: Yeah. That's how I started or whatever. Like that. But I never go serious with rapping. That wasn't my thing.

OL: So you came back for the music?

DJ: I came back to the music.

OL: So now you're just DJing. That's all you do.

DJ: Yeah, that's what I do. Right now, I went from [stuttering]. I used to DJ for Wu-Tang, for Raekwon.

CJ: How did that go? How did you meet Raekwon?

DJ: I was on 125<sup>th</sup> Street one day, this was in 2002, 2003. I was walking down the street—

OL: Everything happens to you in Harlem when you're walking down the street.

DJ: No, seriously. That's true. I never [laughter]

OL: You have good luck when you're walking around.

DJ: That's true. I've got to go back tonight and see what happens when I walk [unclear]. I was going, my friend had an office for a magazine called Street Smarts magazine. He had an office on 125<sup>th</sup> and Madison upstairs right next to, on top of the fish spot. So I was going up to see him, and inside the building there's those stores that have the custom sneakers or whatever. So I just happened to go in, I was going to see my friend, and he was like, "Raekwon is over there." I was like, "Where." He said, "In the store, in the sneaker store." I was like, "Yeah." He said, "You should go over there and talk to him." And I was like, "I'm not going to go over there and talk to him. I was always like shy, not shy, but, "What am I going to say—"

CJ: What am I going to say to him?

DJ: "He doesn't know who I am." [Stuttering]. When I went in and saw him, I was like, "I'm talking." So at that time, see I started just so this is going to make sense, I started doing mix tapes.

OL: OK

DJ: My first mix tape, or I say my first real mix tape, my first real mix tape was in 2000, was 2000. That was the first mix tape I had ever done, period. A real mix tape. And I called myself DJ Thoro and I'm going to do mix tapes now. It was called Happy Thoro's year.

OL: OK.

DJ: That was my first mix tape. So from 2000 to 2002, that what, I started becoming a mix tape DJ. Like trying to take out the cool and the doo-wop and S&S and Ron G. and people like that or whatever. So when I met Raekwon, it was 2000, it was 2003, so I had three years of CDs on the street. But I didn't think, I wasn't that big, I didn't think he knew who I was. So when I approached him, I was like, "Rae, how are you doing? I'm DJ Thoro" or whatever, and I gave him a CD. And he looked at the CD and said, "You're DJ Thoro?" just like that. And he was like, "I know who you are." And I said, "Yeah?" and he said "Yeah?" So my confidence level went up—

OL: Sure.

DJ: So, I was like, "Listen." I was like, this is exactly how it happened. Right on the street. I was like, "Listen, I'm available if you ever need a DJ." He's like, "You know what? I'm getting ready to go on tour. I need a DJ." He was with his brother, he was like, "Take my brother's information, and yeah, I could use a DJ." Just like that. So I

was like, "Cool." I never really thought, I was like, "Cool." So he gave me his brother's number and was like, "Call me tomorrow because I've got a video shoot. Call me tomorrow." The next day, I called him the next day, and I was like, "I'm DJ Thoro." And his brother, I didn't really talk to his brother, so his brother was like, "Who?" So I was like, "This is Thoro. I met your brother at the 125<sup>th</sup> Street yesterday." He was like, "Oh, yeah, yeah. We remember you." He was like, "Hold on." So Rae got on the phone. He was like, "Hey, yo, what are you doing right now?" I was like, "Nothing." He said, "Come to Staten Island. We're doing a video shoot. I was like, "All right. So when I went to the video, he was recording a song called, "The Hood" for his third album or whatever. So he was like, as soon as I got to the video shoot, he was like, "Are you ready? We're leaving tomorrow." I was like, "Huh" [Laughter].

OL: Where are we going?

DJ: He was like, "We're leaving tomorrow. We're going to be gone for a month. Can you do it?" "Yeah." He was like, "We're leaving tomorrow." I was like, "OK." We're going everywhere. We're going to Phoenix, Philly, LA, Cali, Texas, Minnesota, we did like 50 states.

OL: That's amazing.

DJ: We did 50 cities, not 50 states. 50 cities or whatever.

CJ: I went to that tour. In Milwaukee.

DJ: You were there? And that's how it happened.

OL: Wow.

CJ: It was when Ivory Flag came out.

DJ: Yeah. And that's how it happened. Just like that.

OL: That's incredible.

DJ: Yeah.

OL: And it sounds like you've been traveling a lot since then.

DJ: Yeah, I've been to, I've been all over. I've been to Finland, Moscow, Russia, Norway,

CJ: Do you mostly travel with Wu-Tang?

DJ: Well, I'm not DJing for Rae anymore. I was getting to that. I don't DJ for Rae anymore. There's no bad blood or anything, I just don't DJ for him anymore. Yeah,

but I've been to Finland, Amsterdam, Iceland, Greenland, all over Europe. Copenhagen, Denmark, Buda—Romania, I've been everywhere. In Europe anyway. I've been all over Europe. I've been to France. I've never been to Africa but I got to see Africa because—

OL: You were in Spain?

DJ: I was in Southern Spain. You can see it. It was amazing to me. He was like, "That's Africa right there." I was like, "That's Africa." Like you could see it in the distance. It's not like right there, but you could see it.

OL: Right.

CJ: Was this as a solo, just a DJ?

DJ: This is all the places I went on tour with Rae. He took me all over the world. Germany. I was telling him, I went to Frankfurt, I didn't go to Berlin. We went to Frankfurt, Stuttgart, and some other places I can't pronounce.

CJ: What were the Wu-Tang fans like?

DJ: They're like hard-core. They got a cult, you know, Wu-Tang has a cult following.

OL: Oh yeah.

DJ: They're going to always get money and be able to do shows. They're like the Beatles or the Rolling Stones. Overseas, they're always going to be able to tour and do shows because they have classic material. Like that's what he does to this day. He doesn't do anything new. Everything, he does everything from the Protect Ya Neck album. Cream and Casuals, everything.

CJ: [Unclear]

DJ: They don't do anything new. Everything they do is classic. So, and they've been doing that since '93. Same stuff. And they just do it every year. Over and over and over and over and over. I'm serious. So, yeah. I DJed for Rae from like 2002 until, like 2006. So three years, I'm sorry, four years I DJed for Rae. And basically what happened with that situation is I just moved on. I kind of outgrew the situation or whatever. But, you know, Rae really gave me my first shot there.

OL: Yeah.

DJ: Because I never had, when I started dealing with him, we were on stage in front of 50,000 people. We used to do stadiums. I had never been in front of that many people, so I used to be scared. Even to this day, if I do a show to this day, I still get butterflies.

OL: Sure.

DJ: Once I get into it, I'm cool. After Rae, I DJed for Raekwon, I DJed for Jazil, I DJed for the Beatnuts before—

OL: Wow.

DJ: But right now, who I'm DJing for is Cassidy. I just recently started DJing for him because he was in a little bit of legal trouble, so he just came home a year and a half ago. So I've just been rocking him, that where I'm at right now. Just DJing for Cassidy and producing. And I'm doing mix tapes. Like right now, me and Big Mike, we're number one. As far as mix tapes, we're number one in the world.

CJ: How many mix tapes?

DJ: I'm not even bragging.

OL: No, I know.

DJ: Like—

CJ: Because he got the source two or three years—

DJ: We got the record. We've been in the source most of the time of anybody

OL: I looked through your MySpace page—

DJ: Nobody's ever been in the source as many times as we have. We've been in it seven months straight for the best mix tape of the month. No DJ has ever done that.

OL: That's incredible.

DJ: Nobody's ever done that. And we've got the Mix Tape Awards coming up in April. It's just those mix tape awards. We're nominated for best duo for mix tape.

OL: Oh, that's great.

DJ: And God willing, we'll win that.

CJ: I've got to switch the tape because this one's about to end—

OL: OK.

CJ: So maybe we can take a little break.

OL: OK. I won't ask another question until he starts again. If you want a cookie or something, help yourself.

DJ: [Unclear] What's your nationality?

OL: I'm from Guyana.

DJ: Guyana. Okay. Nobody ever told you that you look like Rae Dawn Chong?

OL: No, I don't think so.

DJ: You don't think you look like her?

OL: I can see what you mean.

DJ: I guess it's the hair.

OL: Curly hair.

DJ: Yeah [Laughter].

OL: Most people today don't know who Rae Dawn Chong is.

CJ: I've never heard of her.

DJ: You seen B Street?

CJ: I have. A long time ago.

OL: You know Chichen Chong? She's Chong's daughter.

DJ: Now, you know what? I didn't know that. Really?

OL: Yeah.

DJ: So she's Mexican and black? She is?

CJ: That's cool.

OL: Yep.

DJ: Wow. I just learned something. I knew who she was, but I didn't know who her father was. I didn't know that was her father. Oh, Chong, yeah. [Mumbling]. Wow.

CJ: We're rolling.

OL: Well, I wanted to ask you some questions about how your family sees what you do today. Like now that you've had so much success doing this.

DJ: I don't want to talk bad about my family, but it's like a bandwagon now. No, it is. Once she saw that I could make money and help her and know that I'm okay, she's pretty content with it. And, you know, now she brags to her friends because I've been on BT, Rap City, MTV. Every time I do a mix tape, they always publicize it on TV. So I got like, she records all these shows. So I got like [unclear]. The highlight, too, of my life was that I did the Apollo,.

OL: Wow.

DJ: That was my first, if you know anything, if you know the history of the Apollo, I actually stood, I actually performed at the Apollo. It was me, Cassidy, and Swiss Beats.

OL: Wow. That's amazing.

DJ: That was on October 6.

OL: OK.

DJ: I came on and she recorded it. So, you know, that was a big deal. That was a very big deal to me.

OL: Definitely.

DJ: Like I can say I performed at the Apollo. Michael Jackson performed there. Teddy Penny—

OL: Yeah, definitely.

DJ: Anybody, you name it. Like I stood on that same stage and I performed. So that was like, that's like my greatest accomplishment so far or whatever. You know, now that she's, seeing is believing, and now that she sees that I'm pretty successful and I'm happy. So now she's bragging about it. Whereas before, she was like, "You're wasting your time, like get a real job, yeah."

OL: Where do you live now?

DJ: I live on 120<sup>th</sup> and Morningside in Harlem.

OL: Okay. Okay. And your mother is still—

DJ: My mother lives in Florida now.



OL: OK. So—

DJ: My brother is still here, everybody else is still here, but my mother, she don't like New York.

CJ: If you could guess or approximate, how may thousands of mix tapes would you say you have sold since you started?

DJ: Sold? Well I've never sold any mix tapes. They're for promotional use only [laughter].

CJ: I mean, how many have you distributed?

OL: Have you distributed, perhaps?

DJ: For promotional use only of course.

CJ: Because this is what I find so fascinating about mix tapes. It's completely mom and pop. It's without any major label, and it's out of your trunk.

OL: It's your operation.

DJ: If I had to say, if I had to guess, collectively, everything I've done, including the bootlegging that goes into it, I would say that I've done a million or two million. Something like that. I only say that because right now, probably more than that, probably on the estimate of, right now there's a website called DatPiff. I told you about it, DatPiff. If you go on there, they track how many people are downloading CDs. Well, I did this CD with Cassidy called Hustler's Home. I don't know if you got that CD. It's like the first CD that he did when he came home from jail or whatever. That CD got downloaded 1.2 million times.

OL: Wow.

DJ: That was just that one CD. So maybe I am underestimating when I say collectively. It's like way more than that. Millions. I'll just say millions. That one CD was downloaded 1.2 million times. So I'm sitting here thinking, "Wow, if I had a dime for every download, or a dollar—"

CJ: How does that work though? Do you make a CD? Do you have someone that copies it for you? How does that work?

DJ: Well, with that site, they just get the CDs however they get them and post them up for free and people just download them.

CJ: I mean on the street, when you can go to Canal Street, like there's a little mix tape shop. How do those people get your CDs.

DJ: Distributors. I have certain distributors that I deal with, so when I make CDs, I give them to certain distributors and they take them to Canal Street and they take them to Jamaica Avenue. They take them to Fulton. They take them to Fordham Road. You know, like that. That's how that works. And then, from there, it multiplies.

CJ: It multiplies..

DJ: This person gets it and this person gets it and this person gets it. Next thing you know, somebody's calling you from Norway. "I got, I went to a party," like "What?" Somebody might call you from Egypt or Dubai. It's crazy. Like how far those things travel. It's crazy. Especially, I would say the Internet is the best thing in the world now for—

CJ: Upcoming artists.

DJ: For promotion, because you can reach a whole other audience that you wouldn't be able to reach otherwise. And things like that, it's the best thing that happens, as far as promotional use, anyway.

OL: You mentioned before that you teach now. Where do you teach?

DJ: I don't teach at a school. I teach people—

OL: That you know.

DJ: That I know

CJ: [Unclear]

DJ: Like I have this girl that lives down the block. She's a schoolteacher. She's like 23 years old. She had never DJed in her life, and when I tell you it's so much better when somebody teaches you because you can pick it right up, she picked it right up. And everything. She never touched turntables in her life, and she could go [simulates sound] like that. And she could backspin. It took me years, because I didn't know the coordination, I didn't know the coordination and I taught her that in 30 minutes. I taught her that in 30 minutes and it took me years to learn. So—

OL: Have you ever heard of a guy who DJs named DJ Flawless?

DJ: I think the name rings a bell. I don't know him personally.

OL: He calls himself DJ Flawless and then there's a DJ Number One Flawless. He's they guy who grew up in the Bronx and we interviewed him and one of the things he told us when we interviewed him was that his dad, DJ Rockin' Rob, was also a DJ.

DJ: OK

OL: And it was his way of getting close to his father. And he was emulating his father, doing what his father did. And a lot of what you said about your childhood reminded me of that because you wanted to be like your older brother, it was something you did to keep yourself out of trouble, to keep safe. And I think that's interesting because it really goes against what people think hip-hop is about. So I was hoping you could talk about that a little bit, what hip-hop means to you and what makes it different from the stereotype of what hip-hop is about.

DJ: Yeah. I can honestly say that if it hadn't been for music, I probably would have strayed in to negativity by not being focused on something positive. Because an idle mind, it's not good. If you don't have anything to do, you tend, it's easier for you to stray or get into trouble. So I think hip-hop is a blessing, because for one, it brings cultures together. Like I've met people from all over the world that necessarily, I have nothing in common with except for music. And I think that music helps bring people together, it helps you understand each other's culture and each other. So I think it's a positive thing, because I think there a lot worse things that people could be doing instead of hip-hop.

OL: Sure. Yeah, yeah.

DJ: So I think people who say things like that, they're speaking from an ignorant point of view. They're not looking at it for what it is. I mean, would you rather a kid rap or go over here and do this. It gives you an alternative. So I think it's a blessing, and I think it is positive. You know, hip-hop is a reality. A lot of people, they talk about things that they've seen when they grew up. They may not necessarily have done it. It's almost like a street poet. A lot of people, I'll call them outside America, they don't understand, people report "He shot this," "He did that." Well they're not necessarily saying they did that, but this is what they see. It like street reporting. Or even the movies. No one criticizes Arnold Schwarzenegger for killing 400 people in a movie, so if somebody tells a fictitious story that they killed somebody in the record, it's just a story. It's just entertainment. They didn't really do that because they'd be in jail right now.

OL: Right, right.

DJ: You know.

OL: I see what your saying.

DJ: So people got to understand, music is just entertainment. It's verbal entertainment, just like the movies is visual entertainment. A lot of people, they don't know

OL: Yeah, exactly.

DJ: I think that's the best way to explain it. Music is verbal entertainment. It's just like movies. Movies is visual entertainment. People go to the movies and watch people have sex or get killed and, "Ah, it's praise." But if you rap about that same thing, "Aww, aww, that's bad." It's not right.

OL: I thought it was interesting that the first artist you said you worked with was a woman. Can you talk about other work you've done with women and do you feel that there's a place for female artists in hip-hop?

DJ: Yeah. Women are very much a part of the beginning of hip-hop just like men. You have like Shatra, Lisha Lee, Debby D, a group called the Us Girls, So women have been around just as long as men. And the starting of hip-hop and the future of hip-hop, they definitely have a place. Even today, you have the Little Cans or Emmy Martins you know, people like that. So I see it as equal. I'm not a chauvinist. Women have just as much importance as men. And I idolize women just as I idolize men. I used to love MC Light and Antonette. People like that from ages or whatever. They have their place just like men. They have their place right along with men. It's equal. Like I have, some of those old tapes I have, like Shat-ra and Leesha Lee and Debby D, they're right on those tapes, right in the park with Grandmaster Katz and everyone else.

OL: Wow.

DJ: Same thing. So they definitely have their place. They might not get as much publicity or respect, or props. But they've been there since Day 1.

OL: Any other questions, Charlie? The only other thing I wanted ask you about from before is where were your parents originally from? Was your dad from Florida?

DJ: Well, my father is from here and my mother is from Florida, so that's where—

OL: That's how you ended up with the Florida connection. Well, what's the next big thing you want to do? What's the thing you want to next.

DJ: Well, what I want to do, my ultimate goal is I want to leave a legacy of greatness, and I want to teach my son my knowledge and I'm still letting him, because a lot of kids today, if it's not put in their face or, they way music is today, if it's not on the radio, they don't about it. Nobody goes out and searches or learns the history. Like rock-and-roll and hip-hop is two different genres. You ask a young kid, if you ask a 10-year old kid who the Rolling Stones are, and they know. But if you ask a 10-year old kid who Eric Bee is [unclear] they don't know. So I want to kind of like continue to create the awareness of where it comes from or where its going. Even me, I wasn't born in the '30s or the '40s, but I still know music because I seeked it out.

OL: You paid attention to your parent's music/

DJ: Yeah, and I seeked it out. And I still know music from the '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s. I seeked it out. So I just want to continue to create awareness. I even do that when I DJ to this day. I still play break beats. I still play rock, hip-hop, calypso, soca, reggae, breaking beats. I teach. Music, you're supposed to teach. A lot of people, they don't teach. They play what they want you to hear. They condition you. Just like the radio. The radio conditions you. You're basically listening to someone else's taste. So the thing is, you can't like what you've never heard. So there's a lot of music that people never hear because they depend on the radio to dictate to them what's good music. And half of that is the program directors, too.

OL: How old is your son?

DJ: My son is three. He's three years old.

OL: That's great. Thank you so much. That was a great interview.

DJ: Thanks for having me.

CJ: Thank you

[END TAPE}