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Interviewees: Ed Tucker, John McGilcrest and Ron Nelson
Interviewer: Mark Naison
No Date

Mark Naison (MN): This is the fifty-first interview with the Bronx African-American History Project. I am here in Beacon, New York with Ed Tucker and John McGilcrest, both of whom grew up in the Morrissania section of the Bronx. We'll start with how your families first came to the neighborhood, and we will do you, Ed, first. When did your family first move to the Bronx?

Ed Tucker (ET): My father came from Georgia and my mother came from Philadelphia, and I think they arrived after World War II. My father was a veteran.

MN: Right, now did they move directly from the South to the Bronx or did they live in Harlem first?

ET: You know, I am not sure.

MN: John, what about your family? When did they move to the Bronx?

John McGilcrest (JM): OK, my family is basically a Jamaican extract. My mother was born in New York, but her parents migrated to Manhattan from Jamaica. My father was in the British Navy in World War I; he was born in Jamaica. They mustered him out in New York and he stayed in the United States. He met my mother in Pelham Bay and they got married. Initially, they lived in Manhattan, I think. They moved to the Bronx after my first sister was born, and when they moved in, 906 Union Ave., it was a Jewish neighborhood. I think they were the first blacks to move in.

MN: Do you remember what year that is?

JM: I do not know. I would have to ask my sister.

MN: Were you born yet when they moved in there?

JM: No.

MN: OK. So then, if you were born in 1942--

JM: They probably moved in sometime in the thirties.

MN: In the thirties, right. And Ed, when did your family move into the Bronx?

ET: I do not know the exact year, 'cause I was born in 1943.

MN: Were you born in the Bronx?

ET: I was born in Mauritania Hospital in the Bronx, yes.

MN: Where was your family's apartment located?

ET: 1310 Prospect Ave.

MN: What was the cross street?

ET: Prospect between Holmes St. and E. 168th. I do know that before they moved to Prospect Ave., they lived on Dawson St. They mentioned that.

MN: Dawson St. is--

ET: Dawson St. is south of Prospect Ave.

MN: What were your fathers' occupations?

ET: My father drove a cab. He drove a truck because in the Army he was in the Quartermaster Corps and he used to tell me how his job was in the segregated army in World War II was to pick up the dead bodies and put them into this truck. So he did a lot of driving and he was also an auto mechanic. That was what his livelihood was.

MN: Did he work mostly in Manhattan, the Bronx or both?

ET: Well, when you drove a cab, that was all over, all over the city. I remember one time he drove cerebral palsy children in a school bus. He basically did, I would say, short-term driving.

MN: John, what did your father do?

JM: My father worked as a blue collar worker down at [WHO-BEGOT??]. WHO-BEGOT made Chantilly, and that was in Manhattan.

MN: Now, what was Chantilly?

JM: The fragrance is--it's a well-known fragrance that's still around today even though the company is long gone, bankrupt. But the fragrance is still out there.

MN: OK.

JM: If you tell somebody about Chantilly they all recognize the fragrance. You say WHO-BEGOT that's, that's gone, and the WHO-BEGOT name is actually gone at this point. But he worked down in Manhattan, matter of fact he was with them for forty-three years.

MN: Now was he a member--were they unionized? Was there a union?

JM: He was a member of the union and, I guess, by the time he retired they made him a Vice-President.

MN: What union was this?

JM: It was one of the Teamsters. I don't know what local.

MN: So he was in the Teamsters Union.

JM: I believe that they were part of the Teamsters.

MN: And was your father part of the union as a cab driver?

ET: No.

MN: When you moved to--when you were growing up were the blocks you lived on racially mixed?

ET: When I was growing up, I would say that most of the people on my block were African-American.

MN: What about you, John?

JM: Same here.

MN: What about elementary schools you went to? Did you go to public or Catholic elementary schools?

JM: We both went to St. Anthony's.

MN: To St. Anthony's.

ET: St. Anthony's at the time was mostly African-American.

MN: So this was a Catholic elementary school that was mostly African-American and this was in the late forties, early fifties?

ET: Fifties, late forties, and well, ironically, the school was run by the missionary nuns.

JM: Maryknoll sisters.

ET: And we found out later, right, they were Maryknoll sisters, that they were a missionary society and, in essence, we were their mission.

MN: Were your families Catholic converts or were they Catholics in Georgia and Jamaica?

ET: My father was a Protestant. My mother, however, was raised by the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Corn Wells Heights, Pennsylvania. It was

a Catholic boarding school and she was the one who was the prime mover behind me being baptized and being raised a Catholic.

MN: What about you, John?

JM: To make a long story short, my mother and sisters became Catholic around the time of my grandmother's death. Obviously this was before I was born. There was a Catholic priest at the hospital who was very nice to them and they took up the religion at that point.

[INTERRUPTION BY FOURTH VOICE]: Hello, hello, hello.

[BREAK IN TAPE]

MN: This is Ron Nelson who has joined our group. When did your family first move to the Bronx?

RN: I was born in 1942 and I think they moved to the Bronx in '4..., it was during the war, 1944.

MN: Where did they move to the Bronx from?

RN: They were living in Harlem on 145th St. between, let me see if I can remember this, Amsterdam Ave. and Broadway.

MN: Do any of you recall how your families found out there were apartments available in the Bronx?

RN: How they found out?

MN: Yes, you know, how they found the Bronx as a place to move into, because the neighborhoods that you all lived in were, ten years before, were not centers of African-American settlement in the Bronx. So we are kind of tracking how those decisions were made, or was that not something anybody

talked about?

RN: In general terms, from what I can remember from hearing conversations, where we moved it was mostly a Jewish neighborhood. In fact, the train system, the subway system, enabled my parents to get into work and there were apartments available.

MN: Where was the first apartment your family moved to?

RN: 167th and Interval Ave. between Interval and Stebbins.

MN: Was your family Catholic? Did you go to St. Anthony's?

RN: Yes, my father was Catholic, but he was a non-practicing Catholic. My story about how I became a Catholic is an interesting one, but that is for another time.

MN: No, no. Go ahead and tell us.

RN: My father was a Catholic, my mother wasn't. My mother was Methodist and becoming a Catholic had more to do with the public school system than it had anything to do with religion.

MN: So St. Anthony's was seen as a better option academically than the local public schools?

RN: Yes.

JM: Absolutely. I started the first, second, third grade-- well, kindergarten, first, second, third grade at P.S. 124.

MN: What street was that on?

JM: That was about 160th and Tinton, and my mother realized that the--was very dissatisfied with the education I was getting there so we were going to

St. Anthony's. In the fourth grade I linked up with Ron and Ed in St. Anthony's.

MN: Ron and Ed, you were both in St. Anthony's since the first grade?

ET: First grade.

RN: No, not quite. I went to kindergarten and first grade at P.S. 99, which is on Stebbins Ave. My parents were dissatisfied with what was happening with me in school and they put me in St. Anthony's in the second grade. That's when I came over and went into Ed's class, in the second grade.

MN: How many classes per grade did St. Anthony's have?

RN: I think one.

JM and ET: One.

MN: Oh, it was because at some of the public schools they had one to nine and they rated you from, you know--so there was only one, so it was a fairly small school. How many people were in each grade, would you say?

ET: Thirty, forty.

MN: And this was boys and girls together in the same class?

All: Yes.

MN: Did you wear uniforms in Catholic school?

All: Yes.

MN: What did they look like?

ET: A shirt and tie.

JM: It was a light brown, ugly brown shirt, right? And a dark brown tie we had to wear.

ET: And the girls had to wear a similar color, but they had to wear a solid skirt. A skirt, if I remember correctly, and a white blouse.

MN: Now, at the time did boys and girls have to wear shirts and ties in the public schools?

ALL: No. [LAUGHTER]

MN: There was no comparable dress code?

All: No.

MN: As Catholic school students, how were you perceived by your peers walking down the street in uniform? Was that ever an issue?

JM: Well, they knew where we went to school. [LAUGHTER]

MN: Nobody was ever making fun of you or putting a little dig in?

RN: No. I had more interesting moments with the bullies at St. Anthony's than bullies on the street. [LAUGHTER] No, it wasn't an issue. They just knew where I went to school.

MN: Did any of you know the young women from St. Anthony's who became the Chantels? Arlene Smith and--

JM: They were in our grade. Arlene Smith, Jacqueline Landry, Renee Minors, Melissa Goring, who was the fifth one? Jacqueline, I said Jacqueline Landry. Yes, we grew up with them and the funny thing about the Chantels--and it would be nice to talk to Arlene because I understand Jackie died. I saw Arlene on TV and she was doing a thing about the fact that Jacqueline died. But there was a Maryknoll sister, Sister Richard Marie, who was in charge of the choir. St. Anthony's had the best choir in New York, they won all the

competitions down at St. Patrick's Cathedral back in the fifties. Those girls learned how to sing from Sister Richard Marie. Arlene Smith's mother was very aggressive in terms of what these girls will do for the future, as they were getting into the seventh and eighth grade. And, as a matter of fact, Arlene was taking opera lessons as I remember. But somehow, I guess, Arlene's mother linked up with Dick Clark and the Chantels became the Chantels and the rest is history.

MN: St. Anthony went to eighth grade, and so then you went to high school. Now, you knew the Fox family because I am in touch with Heddy, who people call "Bunchy" Fox.

ET: We went to school with-- Ina was the older sister?

JM: Ina was in our--

MN: Ina was? What was also interesting is that Bunchy said that she was a foul shooting champion at the time. Did they have women's basketball in the school, or was that something that was not that well publicized among the guys?

RN: Bunchy was before my time, so I do not remember much.

MN: Was sports emphasized in that particular school? Did they have tennis?

JM: There was a boy's basketball team that was coached by a police officer, who would coach whenever he got time off from being a New York City police officer. I was on the hundred-pound team and we got no coaching at all. In fact, in the eighth grade we had a perfect record: we lost every single game. [LAUGHTER] That was, I think, the extent of the sports, but we did have a

nun, Sister Anne Joseph, who was very athletic. She may have done something with the girls. I don't remember back that far, but I assume there was something that the girls were doing in terms of basketball, because of this particular nun who pushed athletics.

MN: Was there a Catholic Youth Organization out of St. Anthony's?

RN: Yes. I remember there was a C.Y.O. activity that ran out of St. Anthony's during the summer. I remember participating in it. It was like day camp; there wasn't away camp.

MN: Now, did the people who went to St. Anthony's also participate in the after school centers at the public schools? Did any of you go to, I guess, like 99 must have had a night center?

RN: I would go to 99 because I was essentially around the corner from 99.

MN: What were the kinds of activities they had at night center or afternoon center there?

RN: I remember ping-pong, what we used to call knock hockey...ping-pong, I'm trying to remember... the pool, other kinds of outside games.

MN: This was a question I asked John and Ed. What kind of work did your father do?

RN: My father was a restaurant worker; he worked for the Horn and Harden

MN: Oh, the Horn and Harden.

RN: Right, which no longer exists.

MN: So he worked in Manhattan. Was he a member of the union? Were they unionized?

RN: He would call it a B.S. union. [LAUGHTER]

MN: So this was the Hotel and Restaurant Workers?

RN; It was some version of something. He never had that much respect for it, if I can remember.

MN: Outside of school, what was the neighborhood like, in terms of street life and the kinds of things kids did after school?

RN: One thing, and I am going to put in a plug for St. Anthony's in terms of activities while we were in school, I would say that we had the largest altar boy society in the Bronx at the time. There were at least forty-five of us. Under a priest, young Irish priest, Father Ryan, was responsible. And we lived to be altar boys for the Saturday meetings. We would meet and play for two hours before the meetings to get our assignments and all.

MN: So it was exciting to be part of this parish and this school. Would you say it was a lot of *esprit de corps*?

RN: Yes.

JM: Also around, I would have to say and I know the other guy did, we had friends that were centered around the buildings that we lived in, or on the block that we lived on, that did not go to St. Anthony and what not.

MN: [Refers to photograph] This priest is?

ET: Father Charles Dean, who, at the time, was president of Fordham University. I had a part-time job in his office. [Refers to photograph] That is Michael Mitchell.

MN: How many priests were at St. Anthony?

RN: Four, and I will give you a picture of them if I can find it.

MN: What were their names?

RN: Monsignor Russell, Father Vann, Father Ryan, and Father Ruen [??].

Father Vann and Monsignor Russell were the older priests; Father Ruen and Father Ryan were the younger priests.

ET: Ryan was the youngest.

RN: They ran a youth group for the boys.

MN: At Sunday mass how many people would be there? Was this in the hundreds or many hundreds, would you say?

JM: I would not think many hundreds

RN: at each mass, or...?

MN: Yes, at the largest mass on a Sunday.

RN: Was it usually the nine o'clock mass? There was a good crowd.

JM: It was a good crowd. You would not see that many empty seats in the pew. It was pretty full.

MN: Did you have much contact with the large Catholic church in Mauritania, St. Augustine's? Was there any games?

JM and RN: I did not.

MN: So it was pretty much your own parish?

RN: Well, I was a member of the Boy Scouts Troupe that ran out of St. Augustine's.

JM: Again, I would say it was the guys we went to school with at St. Anthony's and then the people who lived around you on the block or in your apartment.

MN: If you look at the group of people who you all went to school with, did the majority of them end up going to college and becoming professionals?

RN: I know I pretty much lost track. I can't say authoritatively.

JM: My impression, and again, I could not say authoritatively, but there was a group of us, three of which you are talking to now, the group that we were in, we were the good boys. The smart ones who got (A)s and (B)s. We were not ruffians.

MN: There were ruffians in the school?

JM: Oh yes, and Ed will—he will tell you a little more about that. [LAUGHTER]
We went on to the Catholic high schools and then on to college. What percentage of the group we were...

RN: I cannot give you a percentage, but even beyond the college I had an impression that a number that did not go to college became cops, you know. I knew a couple of guys that were in the police department or the civil service or working for the city.

MN: So there was a definite group of tough kids in the school. So tell me a little bit about that.

ET: You insist on bringing back bad memories. [Laughter]

MN: All memories are important. I had that experience, too. So you tell me yours and I will tell you mine.

ET: Compared to what you would consider tough in the hood today, they really weren't. They teased a lot and they might have pushed people around and they might have extorted some lunch money every now and then, but

not like today, where you can get shot or...they were bullies.

MN: Right. So you had our bullies and the smart kids were the ones who were more likely to be targeted.

ET: Oh, absolutely. The goodie-good kids.

JM: One of the things, to go further to the block, that I say about the South Bronx-- I am a Vietnam veteran. A lot of the kids that went to public school wound up in the service, or, as Ron said, a lot of them became cops. There are even some guys in gangs that later on became police officers and youth workers to help the younger generations coming up. Yes, there was a percentage who overdosed, who fell by the wayside, but that was not... I would say in the fifties and sixties of the kids that were growing up with us, that was a minority.

ET: We predated the heroine epidemic.

MN: So the heroine did not hit the kids in your cohort very hard.

RN: I think not as heavy as it did the people following us.

MN: Going back to the block life, what sort of street games did people play when you were growing up?

RN: Ringalivio, slug, stickball, basketball, handball.

ET: What was big?

RN: Roller derby was big on TV. TV had just come out and roller derby was big. I remember roller derby-- taking two manholes on opposite ends of the streets using roller skates and playing a version of roller derby which is unheard of now.

JM: You want to get some street games resurrect some history of those days that are perhaps lost now. Do you guys remember the game loadies (??)?

ET: Absolutely.

JM: Loadies was taking a checker on the blacktop where you had boxes, and you would shoot this checker to the various boxes to get from 0 to 10. And whoever got there first won the game. We had that, of course, there was marbles, but Loadies was the thing. You could use a soda cap to play that, and it is something that is part of the history.

MN: Was that played in other boroughs? Because I do not remember playing that in Brooklyn and several people from the Bronx have mentioned Loadies.

JM: I would imagine it got to Manhattan, but, you see, the thing is—there was too much traffic in Manhattan and other areas. You had to be on a street where the traffic was light because you were in the middle of the street playing this, a car came by...

ET: We used chalk to draw the boxes.

RN: Or there were preset courts. They put it in the playground because it was that popular.

JM: Also, if you were really skilled, there was a little wooden round thing that you used.

MN: You were on Union Ave., you were on Prospect, where was your family?

RN: On 167th.

MN: Did they stay in that apartment for a long time?

RN: They stayed in that apartment until, I cannot do the exact year, but it

was the early 1970s when they moved to Co-op City. I finally talked them into moving out of the Bronx.

MN: When did your family leave Union Ave.?

JM: My mother died when I was thirteen. My father moved to Parkchester, oh...sometime in the middle seventies, because I was married.

MN: And what about your family?

ET: Well, it is very interesting. My mother died when I was fourteen. She had a sister, I guess you could call her a spinster-sister, but I attribute a lot of my upbringing to her. After my mother died, she basically was *en loco parentis*, and she raised me along with my—She and my father raised me. Then, I guess it was about 197—in the 1970s I remember moving to Van Buren St. with my aunt.

MN: Van Buren St. is where?

ET: That was over near West Farms.

MN: Near West Farms. Are the buildings you lived in still there or were they part of what went down during the fires?

RN: Mine went down.

JM: Mine was torn down.

MN: Yours burned down and yours was torn down.

ET: Mine is still there.

MN: The community that you were living in, a lot of people describe it as musically pretty extraordinary. You were there in the Doo-Wop years; did any of you try your hand at singing?

ET: No.

RN: My parents had me going to piano lessons, music lessons, until, I guess, what? Age thirteen.

MN: Where did you take your music lessons?

RN: With a woman by the name of Carmen Shepherd in Manhattan. She lived off of Convent Ave. in Manhattan and she was giving music lessons.

MN: Did either of you, John or Ed, take music lessons?

ET: Very briefly. I studied guitar very briefly.

JM: I never did anything with music.

MN: Did any of you go to the talent shows at P.S. 99, which I have heard were--you know, I did an interview with Arthur Crier, who was fairly active in that scene?

RN: Vaguely, but it was not something that I went to. I think I may have gone once.

ET: I do not remember going to that.

JM: Basically, our entertainment was going to somebody's house for a party. Listening to Rock and Roll: The Chantels, Charts--

RN: And the new Latin music that was coming in.

MN: That is another thing that a number of people have mentioned. Virtually everyone I have interviewed who grew up in this area was into the Latin music and the dance to it. So were these apartment parties?

All: Yes.

MN: Were they chaperoned by parents? Were the parents there?

RN: The best parties were at Ina Fox's house. Or her sister's; the Foxes, they had the parties.

JM: Two of the things there...there was a Spanish family that lived across the hall from us; the lady that rented the apartment was from Santo Domingo. People would come up and she would have boarders that would stay there temporarily, and I believe one of the families that was there. The husbands played for Tito Rodriguez. He was a trumpet player for Tito Rodriguez and they eventually moved out and got their own apartment, and years later, when I was in college, I saw him play. What I want to say about the Latin music is it really started in the fifties, and my sisters were dancing Mambo and Cha-Cha. It was not something that all of a sudden up in '61 with Johnny Pacheco, when it really got popular. When it did get popular, all these guys that had been playing all along, like Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, obviously jumped on the bandwagon and rose right to the top. Latin music was a thing from New York; all five boroughs had their ways of dancing to it. You know, if you went to Queens they would dance a little bit differently from the ones in the Bronx, who danced a little bit differently from the ones from Brooklyn. Basically, it was the same thing, but it was local to New York and a little bit of New Jersey.

RN: I will tell you a funny story. When I first went to Hillsdale College in Michigan, I was moving into the dorm; it was the first day. I heard this music, it was Latin, and I said "this guy has got to be from the city," and I tracked him down and he was. He was from the city, because no one outside of New

York City was listening to this.

MN: How did you end up at Hillsdale College?

RN: Oh, that's a long story. [LAUGHTER] We have not gotten to that point yet.

MN: As you were growing up, were you aware of all the nightclubs in the neighborhood: the Hunts Point Palace, Club 845, Boston Ballroom. Were those things that people, kids talked about, or was that more for older people?

JM: My sisters who were older than me, talked about that.

ET: I remember going to the Hunts Point Palace.

JM: Yes, we went there.

RN: And the one on Boston Rd., what was it?

MN: Boston Rd. Ballroom.

JM: My sister was married there. My older sister was married there.

MN: Club 845?

RN: I don't know that. Blue Morocco.

MN: Blue Morocco, Goodson's, those are the places. So you had these Rock and Roll parties. Were these parties places where black and Spanish kids went together, or did the two groups tend to socialize somewhat separately, and what are your recollections of that?

JM: Basically, we were separate, but we did have friends, Cesar and a bunch of others, who were Spanish. Juan Ramos, who went to St. Anthony's with us and we would go to predominantly Spanish parties and they would come to predominantly black parties. We were all mixed. We were all friends; we had

a good time. We danced to Rock and Roll and we would also dance to Latin, we would also dance to another thing, which was West Indian music.

Calypso.

MN: Now, I am starting to collect some music from that time. Who were the calypso artists you remember from that time? Was the Mighty Sparrow...?

JM: I think the Mighty Sparrow--I was just going to say that--was just getting started at that time, because Ina Fox's father would hire him. And they would have these big dances down at riverside Plaza.

MN: Do you remember any of the other names of the calypso people from those years?

ET: Other than the obvious ones?

MN: Did your parents play that music in the house?

JM: My sisters did, but my father and mother were not that much into music. But my sisters, they had the calypso, and prior to us they had music of the forties.

RN: I have a funny answer to that question. Both of my parents were West Indian; both of my parents were from West India, from Kingston, Jamaica. They did not play colorful music. My father liked classical music more than anything else. [LAUGHTER]

MN: When you guys were growing up, were there a handful of white families left in the neighborhood?

JM: Yes.

MN: Where did they fit in the sort of, the social scene when you guys were

growing up?

ET: Those who could not join the white flight remained, but the interactions were positive.

RN: In my building, there was a couple very young, but they started to disappear, I would say, before I went into high school.

MN: So when did white flight really accelerate? Was it sort of a continuous thing?

ET: It probably accelerated before we got out of grade school.

RN: 1955.

JM: Our neighborhood was predominantly African-American.

ET: By 1955 most of them, which was my freshman year of high school, most of them had gone out of my building.

MN: John, before we started taping you mentioned that your group, especially, there was a sense that you were marked to move up and out; you were going to college. Was that something people talked about, or was that understood?

ET: Our parents were the prime motivators there. For example, I remember before I went to high school. Making the decision where to go--my mother had a lot of faith in the nuns, they brought her up. She asked them where I should go to high school, and I remember, the word was "send him to Fordham Prep." So I took the test-- I had to take test to go there--and that is how I went there. It was parental motivation.

RN: My parents were the ones who wanted me to go to college, and prepped

it.

MN: What high school did you go to?

RN: I went to Cardinal Hayes.

MN: Now, was Cardinal Hayes a school that most people were marked for college at that time?

JM: I would not say marked, but I would say if you looked at the yearbook-- and I will bring one when we get together next--If you looked at what the seniors said, you would find that probably 90 percent of them wanted to go to college.

RN: But Fordham Prep. was, I would say, more a high school where people were geared to go on, by the very name.

MN: At Fordham Prep., the point was a preparatory school.

RN: Hayes was a high school, and guys went everywhere when they left there, including myself and John. John went there also. What I thought was even, probably, more unique than parents putting it into your mind that you were going to college was the thing that Mike Mitchell said when he was here the other day, the other month. What I thought was unique was that because we had met, or went to school together, there was this peer thing that you developed which reinforced what our parents were saying. Which I thought to this day is the most unique thing. Because most times parents tell kids to do all kinds of things, but it is not reinforced when they are out there where there peers are. By accident, chance, luck--whatever you want to call it--it was reinforced by us to each other.

MN: Now, that is really remarkable. Were there girls who were doing this for one another, or were they part of your crowd and doing that as well, or was this maybe guy friends?

ET: Well the other thing that helped to make our group so strong was that, as I recall, we were all friends. David, Michael, Ron, John; we were all either only sons or only children. Or in John's case he was the youngest.

MN: So you are the only child ?

RN: Only child.

MN: And you are?

ET: Only child.

RN: We kind of created our own fraternity.

MN: Did you get good mentoring at St. Anthony's from either the nuns or the priests who encouraged you in your aspirations?

ET: I would say the entire program at St. Anthony's was one that encouraged us in our aspirations by demanding excellence.

RN: Expectations were high.

ET: When I talk to people now about diagramming sentences they laugh.

They say "are you serious?"

RN: I talk to teachers-- I have teachers who work for me now, and I knew the multiplication table in the second grade and I did not learn them in St. Anthony's. I learned them the summer before I went to St. Anthony's, before I went in, because I had to learn them before I went in. I talk to teachers now who taught this in high school.

MN: Do you know if anyone has actually written about the school experience at St. Anthony's?

RN and ET: I haven't heard that.

MN: This, again, is a story within itself, that you have this outstanding school in this community that people knew was significantly better than the public school.

ET: I am a wordsmith because of St. Anthony's.

JM: I would say, probably, we are where we are today...

RN: ...because of St. Anthony's.

JM: ...because of the roots that were planted at St. Anthony's.

MN: When you were going to Hayes and you were going to Fordham Prep., what was the reputation of Morris High School at that time?

ET: It was a public school and it was not as good as Hayes, and it certainly not as good as Fordham Prep.

MN: Was it a place to be feared or was it just not a...or that was not even a factor in talking about those years?

ET: That was not a factor.

MN: So none of you grew up with any sense of trepidation of walking on certain blocks?

ET: No, not then. No. I remember coming home at all hours of the night, in the early morning. You could walk to Riverdale Station or Prospect Station or walk Freeman St.

JM: There were gangs in the area at the time, but the kids who were in gangs

respected their elders. If you intimidated them, then, yes, there would be a confrontation. But there was not things in terms of twenty kids here and twenty kids here on the playground and they would fight like you see on TV or *Westside Story*. That did not happen.

RN: You know what pops into my mind right now? I can remember a Halloween where me and a group of kids from my block, with all kinds of handkerchiefs and paint on our face and chalk and stuff, and we put chalk on sticks and we would go around and mark bystanders. And we would meet, there were other groups of kids from other blocks to come, and we would-- remember, it was not hostile stuff; it is not the stuff you read about, gangs or whatever; the Bloods and Crips.

MN: Did any of you grow up with Howie Evans, who I think lived pretty close to you on Prospect Ave.?

ET: That name does ring a bell.

MN: He is a sports writer for the Amsterdam News, and has been a college basketball coach, and I met him when he was an assistant basketball coach at Fordham. He mentioned he was in a gang.

RN: Did he mention the name?

ET: There were the Sportsmen and the Crowns, and I remember having allegiance, at that time, to the Sportsmen. The differences between then and now were when there were fights, fights were with fists. And, at most, somebody might have a garbage top, but nobody ever got shot or cut or anything like that.

MN: He mentioned that there was one particularly tough gang called the Slicksters, that he was in a mostly Puerto Rican gang, and most of the fights were sort of as you described. But this one gang, that may not have actually been in the area but would come there, and was a little more dangerous.

ET: The gangs I remember were the Sportsman, the Crowns, The Scorpions and the Fordham Baldies.

JM: And the Sinners; the Sinners were the Puerto Ricans on the other side of Prospect Ave.

MN: And that is Hunt's Point?

JM: Well, from Prospect Ave., going down towards Westchester, Longwood Ave., up towards Hunt's Point. Well, not even there; they were basically 163rd St. between Prospect and Westchester. Those couple of blocks, those were the Sinners.

ET: Why am I thinking--was there something called--was it the Egyptian Crowns, or is that something different?

RN: That was a division of the Crowns.

JM: The Southern Crowns were on the next block from me, on Union Ave. between 163rd and 165th.

ET: My neighborhood was the El Quinto Sportsmen.

MN: The El Quinto Sportsmen. Now, when you were saying that you had allegiance to the Sportsmen, what did that mean?

ET: Now, I don't want to incriminate myself. [LAUGHTER]

MN: Well, I have done a lot worse in the sixties, you don't have to worry.

JM: You were not allowed to be in a gang if you went to Fordham Prep. or Cardinal Hayes, because you'd be expelled.

RN: At the first assembly at Cardinal Hayes the Father, priest got up in front, Monsignor..., I don't remember his name; it might have been Giblowski, he was the Dean of Discipline. He got up in the front and he said "if we find out that that you're a member of any gang, you are out."

ET: Yes, let me clarify. When I said allegiance, I didn't say a member of. In a particular neighborhood, if you wanted to get along you would indicate that you had allegiance to whoever was the prevailing group in that neighborhood, but not as far as going to gang meetings and that kind of thing.

MN: So, you would just say--what would you say? "I'm a Sportsman?"

JM: No, it was insinuated. If you would go to a party you'd wear a sweater of a certain type. We used to have, Mark diva had one that was black and green, I had one that was black and red, Cesar had one that was black and
[BREAK IN TAPE: END OF SIDE ONE]

JM: Sweaters. Like Eddie said, there were types that was a sign of... that was perhaps the type of sweater you saw on the other side of Prospect Ave. where the Crowns and the Sportsmen were. The Sinners had like a blue jersey, so you would wear a plain blue sweater. You were probably affiliated with the Sinners. This was a big thing not to be in a gang, but to the girls at a high school party to think you were in a gang. Particularly if you were in somebody else's neighborhood.

MN: OK. So you got a little more status with the girls for seeming a little dangerous.

RN and JM: Yes.

JM: At times.

MN: So things don't change. [LAUGHTER] What about the high school experience? You had this great mentoring in elementary school. Did that continue in high school or was it a less positive experience?

ET: I remember a fellow Jesuit named Father Francis A. Fade, and he had a tremendous influence on my life. In fact, I was angry when I got a notice that he had died, because after I had got the notice he was long gone and buried, and I would have gone to his funeral. I interacted with him personally after school practically everyday.

MN: You went to a school where you were the only black student in your grade. Did the other students give you a hard time?

ET: Not really, no.

MN: So this was not a big issue at all?

ET: I think the Catholic identity overrode the other stuff.

MN: Right, and was that true of Cardinal Hayes also?

RN: Although there were more minorities in Cardinal Hayes, one of the things was the Irish and the Italians used to fight all the time, so we didn't have to worry about us. We were in insignificant numbers at the time; there were only a few blacks and a few Spanish. I was not the only one in my grade; Cardinal Hayes had a graduating class of seven hundred.

MN: So that was a big school.

JM: Twenty-five hundred student body.

MN: Wow. All boys?

JM: All boys. We didn't have to wear uniforms, either. There was a dress code: a shirt and a tie and jacket.

RN: It didn't have to be a certain color or anything, but you had to wear a jacket and tie. I thought I was treated like anyone else in terms of -- they had high expectations of me. When I did well and they expected me to go on to college, the big disagreement was what kind of college. They wanted me to go to a Catholic college and I didn't want to go to one.

MN: So that issue came up, and the school you mentioned was not a Catholic college?

RN: Where I went to college?

MN: Yes.

RN: No, I didn't go to a Catholic college.

MN: Well, that is interesting because I went to Columbia, and I had fraternity brothers from Brooklyn Pep. and Fordham Prep. who could not get recommendations to Columbia because, at the time, the schools didn't want them to go to non-Catholic schools.

RN: That was the only real disagreement that I had in Cardinal Hayes, the only conflict I had in Cardinal Hayes. I think once they saw what I could do they were very encouraging.

MN: How did you find this particular school?

RN: That is a good question. I was going to Catholic school, I lived in the Bronx, Cardinal Hayes was in the Bronx. I guess the other choice was where David went, Mount St. Michael, but I don't think it was a consideration. Fordham Prep. was not a consideration--

MN: No, I'm talking about going to college.

RN: Oh, going to college. Oh, after I graduated from Cardinal Hayes I went to CCNY. I flunked out of CCNY my sophomore year. I was out for about a semester and my father, God bless him, on his own, went down to a college center or something like that, and I did an application to see if I could transfer my credits into another school. And I got these catalogues from all these different colleges in the Midwest; it said what kind of school, how large the school is, what areas, etc., and I got all of these applications. Hillsdale, I liked what they had and said and he liked what they had, and I put in an application and they accepted me and I went out there in February of 1962 and I graduated in 1964.

MN: Now, John, did you go directly in the service or did you go to college first?

JM: I went to college first. In terms of mentors, I would have to say the person I remember most and appreciate most at Cardinal Hayes was Mr. Jim Harrington, the track coach who managed to get me a full, four-year scholarship to Iona.

MN: You ran track--

JM: At Hayes.

MN: And you were a top sprinter in those years?

JM: Yes. I was the number one 880 yard relay. The top guys went to Manhattan on scholarships. The next batch, which I was in, went to Iona, for the most part. There were several folks from the Cardinal Hayes track program that went to Manhattan and the rest of us went to Iona. Matter of fact, if you look at my yearbook, my statement is that I wanted to go to Manhattan, but that was all made possible by our track coach, Jim Harrington. I never would have gone to Iona had he not been influential in getting everything set up.

MN: Ed, was Fordham considered the top option at Fordham Prep. at that time? At that time, was Fordham considered the top Catholic college in the country?

ET: As far as the top one it was Fordham, Georgetown, Notre Dame, Catholic University and Holy Cross. There is an interesting story. They used to have weekends that the seniors could go to various colleges, and I remember a weekend going to Holy Cross. I almost went to Holy Cross, except when I got there I saw that to get everywhere you had to go up and down steps, because it was on a hill, and I said "no, I didn't need that." [LAUGHTER] Plus, every morning everybody had to go to Mass. So, between the two things: mandatory mass daily and going up and down the steps, I said "no Holy Cross."

MN: Now, at the time, what year did you enter Fordham?

ET: 1959.

MN: And did you commute?

ET: I took the number three bus from 1310 Prospect, up Prospect Ave., left turn on 187th and right on 3rd Ave. to Fordham.

MN: At that time was the Arthur Ave. community pretty hostile to African-Americans?

ET: Well, I'll put it this way: I never got off the bus there. There were rumors, but I never had a problem. They never threw anything at the bus or anything like that.

MN: What was your Fordham experience like academically?

ET: Well, it was pretty good. At Fordham Prep., after the first year the administration or the faculty selected you either for "Classical Honors", "Science Honors", or "Academic". What they called "Academic", most schools would call "Honors". Anyway, they chose in Classical Honors, that is part of why I became a wordsmith. I ended up with four years of Latin and three years of Greek and three years of German. So that I was considered a scholar there. Matter of fact, Fordham University was anticlimactic; my education had really formed between St. Anthony's and Fordham Prep.

MN: That is very interesting. Do other people who went to Fordham Prep. at that time feel that way?

ET: I don't know.

MN: Now what about your experience at Iona, did the Cardinal Hayes prepare you well for that or was Iona more challenging academically?

JM: I think I was well prepared from Hayes. It was a transition. In those days,

Iona had the Irish Christian Brothers, Hayes was made up of all the orders: the Irish Christian Brothers, Bavarian (??) Brothers, the Marist Brothers, the Jesuits, parish priests, Franciscans. And it was very similar at Iona. They realized that coming out of Mount St. Michael's, Cardinal Hayes and All Hallows, that there was a transition. I would say that freshman year-- I would say, probably, it was like being in Hayes, but you were in college. And I commuted to Iona from the Bronx, and it was one hell of a commute.

MN: How did you get there from Union Ave.?

JM: On my own, I would take the subway train that was elevated up to 241st St. and then I would take a bus, two buses actually, or I would carpool. If someone would have a car, I would meet them somewhere, or if somebody's aunt bought them a car. Very interesting, one of the kids on the track team, who also went to Hayes, his aunt bought him a car, I guess, in our sophomore year. So I would walk from 163rd down to...he was around 145th, somewhere around there, on Union Ave. Another kid would come up from Harlem, who went to Rice. So we would meet up there and we would ride up with Bill. The three of us were on the track team. Then an evening after track practice he would drop us off at his house and we would walk home.

MN: Now did track interfere with your academics, or at that time was it kept in balance pretty well?

JM: My marks were not what they should have been, but that was my fault. My excuse was the commute, and I guess some psychological things that I did not have a car and I felt sorry for myself. But I majored in math and I

managed to graduate. I came out as one of the top ten sprinters in the metropolitan area. That does not mean that I was the tenth fastest kid in New York City. What it meant was that I won a championship race my senior year at Iona, a record that I still hold. Why? Yes, that time has been shattered by subsequent generations, but in those days we ran the 220 on the straight away and we ran on cinder tracks. Now the tracks are this new Prevatex material and they do not run the 220 yards and they run on a turn. So I was the last one to break the school record on a straight away, and the record still stands.

MN: In looking back at this whole experience, do you think that you were lucky to grow up when and where you did relative to subsequent generations?

RN: You know what? Drugs, the thing that I saw that did in what they now call the South Bronx but what we used to call back then, I guess, the East Bronx, was the whole drug thing that broke in the sixties and the seventies. I mentioned earlier how I eventually talked my parents into moving. My mother got mugged twice: once on the street and once in the building while she was waiting to go up on the elevator. The place, it had the crime thing that was driven by the drugs, and it totally deteriorated.

MN: This was in the sixties and seventies?

RN: This is the sixties and seventies. There is nothing that starts automatic, because it was gradual, and it built up, but it really got bad in the late sixties.

MN: Then the neighborhood got dangerous.

RN: Yes, and I have to question if we were born ten years later--

ET: Forget it. We would not be the same.

MN: Yes, and your reflections on that?

ET: Oh, absolutely. The government usually is slower in terms of reacting to social ills, so it was not accidental--it is part of the history of this. The industry that Ron and I ended up working for in 1970 started in 1967. It is called the New York State Narcotic Addiction Control Commission, it started in 1967. The politicians probably started talking about it many years before that.

MN: You both were working in this agency?

RN: Yes.

MN: In the Bronx?

ET: And Ron started at Lenox Garden, and when I started, I will never forget the day he gave me a call. I was working with juvenile delinquents at Swafford and Ron called me and invited me at that time to come over to, at that time, 1511 Fulton Ave., Fulton Community Rehabilitation Center.

MN: That is Fulton and where?

RN: 1511 Fulton Ave., Crotona Park West.

ET: It is now a community-based correctional facility.

MN: Oh, OK. I have passed that by.

RN: But by that time, I...how to put this in terms...in 1964, let's see, I graduated from Hillside and came home, you could still go to the corner of 167th St. and Prospect Ave. and still hail the Yellow cab.

MN: On Prospect Ave.?

RN: On Prospect Ave. 19--you could not do it about two years later. It was impossible.

MN: In 1966 you could not get a Yellow cab?

RN: Impossible. The only thing you could get was the Gypsy.

MN: The yellows stopped coming up there?

RN: A lot of them would stop and what not. I don't know, John, you didn't...if we had been born ten or twelve years later, and instead of us being in St. Anthony's in 1955, 1956, 1960 and 1961...if we had been ten years later, it would have been--I don't know if we would have made it.

JM: It would have been different. The neighborhood, my assessment was it had deteriorated. At the time when we got out of college, we sort of went out various ways and, more or less, we moved away from the neighborhood, but our parents were still there.

MN: So you would go back and visit.

JM: Yes. Now, there was a four year extent--'65 through'69--I was in the United States Army. But I could see the deterioration and I was concerned about my father, who was getting up in age.

I know Ron was concerned for his parents getting up in age, because your aunt had moved up to Van Buren St. The neighborhood was fastly deteriorating and the philosophy, I guess, when we were coming up was go to college, get a good job and move out.

ET: Yes.

JM: Once we did that, we were concerned "well, who did we leave behind?" Well, we left our parents behind. Well, let's get our parents out. Ron's parents went to Co-op City and my father went to Parkchester.

ET: My father went to the West Bronx. The flight from our community was either to the North Bronx or the West Bronx.

MN: What street did you move to?

ET: I don't remember, but it was in the area of Jessup. It was not far from Jessup Ave.

JM: Let's go back a little. The East Bronx I remember growing up in. There were stores, theaters--at least three movie theaters--where you would go and see movies. You would walk up to Westchester Ave. towards Southern Blvd., there were markets and stores and stuff selling everything. The first TV that my parents bought, they bought on Southern Blvd. at this place that sold appliances. I remember saving pennies to go over with my parents to Southern Blvd. There were theaters, at least Southern Blvd., that I can remember going to.

MN: So you had everything in the neighborhood.

JM: Everything was there. I am not going to say it was paradise and I'm not going to say that there was not any crime. I mean, they had a precinct that they later called Fort Apache on Simpson St. I remember a community. I remember a place that everything was there. You would take the train and to go downtown to Manhattan was a big deal and so forth, and that disappeared.

RN: In fact, we never had to go to Manhattan, because you mentioned Southern Blvd. I remember a Chinese Restaurant on Southern Blvd., and I remember going there with my aunt and with my mother, and that was a real treat.

JM: There was one on Prospect Ave., across from the RKO Theater.

MN: A Chinese Restaurant? Did you have chow mein and egg foo yung and all that?

RN: Oh, yes. And all of that disappeared.

JM: There was a Jewish market on the next block on Union Cross on 161st, 162nd, around there. That was there for a long time, and I guess those guys that ran that market started moving out and going elsewhere, I guess, about the time I was in college. So everybody was fleeing the neighborhood, the houses were in disrepair.

MN: The landlord let things go very visibly?

JM: Yes. Houses were not abandoned yet, there were still people living there, but I remember the last years in the seventies, before my father moved to Parkchester, he didn't have to pay rent anymore, because it had basically been abandoned. The boiler did not work, so we said "we have to get you out of here before winter." Which we did.

MN: Now, you have the big neighborhood project, the Forest Houses. When you were growing up, was that considered a dangerous place, the public housing?

ALL: No.

MN: What was the reputation of it?

ET: I remember in those years people had to apply to get into them.

RN: Yes, they were considered desirable housing. The rooms and the apartments were not looked down on as housing, they were modern, new houses, as compared to most of the apartments in the Bronx were old apartment houses built prior to World War II.

MN: Did that change by, let's say, the early seventies or even then things were better there than in the surrounding blocks?

RN: The streets changed by the seventies, so being anywhere outside in that, in the community, was relatively dangerous, especially at night.

MN: So for the older people that was particularly...

JM: Yes. You took the words right out of my mouth. For older people it was becoming dangerous.

RN; For the weak, it was dangerous because the predators were out, because the predators needed money to support the drug habit. And anybody who was weak was on the street. Like I said, my mother coming from the Interval Ave. station coming home, she used to work in Bellevue Hospital, she got mugged on the street. Then, another time, she is in the building, on the first floor waiting for the elevator, and got mugged.

MN: Now your family lived in an elevator building. Was it a six storey building?

RN: Yes.

MN: And this was the one at Holmes St. and 167th?

RN: Yes, and it is still there and, from my understanding, it is a co-op building. That is why it is still standing.

MN: What did it feel like for you to actually be working in a neighborhood and actually see these things going on in a place which had once been so different?

RN: Angry, disappointed. I had been talking to my father, my parents, trying to get them to move for some years. And they had been there for God knows how long, and it was very difficult to get them to move until, finally, like I said, the last incident. Also, another piece he mentions, working for NACC, my jobs back then involved going back into the neighborhood and seeing the same people in the same neighborhood, and some of them in the same buildings, under very different circumstances. First, I worked for DSS Welfare, and then the NACC, and I am going back into the old neighborhood and into the old places, and I can remember being in apartments that you would not believe. You could open the refrigerator and there were roaches all over the inside, I mean, people were in bad shape. The impact that that had on me was that I had to live someplace that was totally different from that. I know that. But, at the time, the stuff about going back into the community. I had no thought about getting back and residing in the community. I may have worked there, but I was not going to live there.

MN: What about you, Ed. Were your reactions to that similar?

ET: Similar in the sense that Ron and I had similar work experiences. I worked for Welfare and I worked for juvenile delinquents, and we both

worked for the Narcotics Addiction Control Commission. So I had to go into the homes also, but later on, in thinking back, I wondered how much--well, two things. I was torn because two things. On one hand--I am going to speak for me. I wondered how much my leaving the neighborhood contributed to the neighborhood's deterioration, but, on the other hand, I said to myself "I would have been grossly outnumbered anyway, and swallowed up by the environment", so it was well that I got out of there.

MN: John, did you end up going into the private sector or the public sector?

JM: I went into the private sector when I came out of the army. As a matter of fact, I wound up in the cosmetic industry, the same industry my father was in, and I used to say I would never get into that, but that is another long story. When I got married, and came out of the service, my wife and I moved back to the Soundview area of the Bronx, in a new high rise building that had just been built. My father was still living on Union Ave. and looking at the way that area had deteriorated and was in a state of deterioration. Again, we were anxious to get him out, get him someplace safe, where we would not have to worry about him. I was disappointed with the area. We were proud to grow up in that area during the time that we did grow up in that area, and I guess we were even proud to say "OK", that we came above, that we got out of the area. It is a shame that that area had deteriorated at that point. Perhaps what I would have liked to have seen was a more rapid transition to the way it is today, with little houses and all the things being equally done.

MN: Ed, you had mentioned in some of your emails of the political life of the community. Did any of you get involved in local politics or were your parents involved?

RN: Through him.

ET: I was very much involved. I think I emailed you that I was part of the reform wing of the Democratic Party. Back in 1962, I was very active in the campaign of Helen Mitchell, who ran for the assembly, the mother of Michael Mitchell, who is the husband of Ida Mitchell, who is the sister of--

MN: Right. Bunchie tried to get an interview with her but she is not feeling well and she was not up for it.

ET: Yes. That was along time ago. She is in her eighties now. I was a regular and in 1964 there was a woman named Anne Whitty who ran for the assembly, and I was working for her campaign.

MN: Did they have a club or storefront in the neighborhood?

ET: Well, in the beginning, the clubs would simply spring up when it came to primary season, and they opened a headquarters. The only existing club back then was the Jackson Democratic Club, which, at that time, some of us young Turks were against.

MN: What was the major motivation in being in the Reform Democrats in those years?

ET: Well, I think I emailed you that one of my political mentors, even though he was from another party, was Frasier Davidson, Jesse's big brother. Frasier had a law office on Prospect Ave. and Frasier was an independent-thinking

Republican at that time. He instilled in me the idea of political free thought, political independence. I saw the Jackson Democratic Club the same way that Ed Koch, in his early years, saw Carmine Desapio.

MN: Right, so the cronyism and the corruption.

ET: Right.

MN: Was there very visible corruption and, if so, how did it manifest itself?

ET: It wasn't that it was very visible. It is just that what we saw was that the main things of the status quo, I think, helped with the deterioration of the community, because what became most important was the political allegiance of the power structure there to the overall machine rather than community involvement.

MN: Do you think that, looking back on it, that the Bronx Democratic Machine dropped the ball during the years that all this deterioration was going on or do you think it was forces beyond its control?

ET: Well, I think they dropped the ball, because the most important consideration, I believe, was the maintenance of power and patronage rather than community improvements or community salvation.

JM: There were forces, economic and social forces working in the city of New York, not just the Bronx, and the country as a whole, not just the Bronx.

Maybe we know more now than the original people that I remember growing up. People were working. The people who were originally moving into the housing projects were working. At some point, the jobs that they were working at went away.

MN: See, that is interesting. That is what one of my friends that is working on this with me says, that the jobs that your fathers worked in the thirties, forties, and fifties ultimately disappear, leaving that next generation either having to have a college education or minimum wage. No more Horn and Harden's .

RN: Right. My father got out of Horn and Harden's just before it collapsed.

MN: Right, and your father worked in a factory?

JM: Well, actually, he was good to go because he retired after forty-three years, and when I came out of the service, I went to work for them. I was with them when they moved to Jersey.

MN: Oh, but then they moved to Jersey.

JM: But what they did when they moved to Jersey--there were a lot of people in the Bronx, because I used to carpool with them. People would commute from New York out to Jersey, which was opposite of the masses going from Jersey into New York. I thought that was funny, but they would commute, and (WHO-BE-GOT) was up until a few years ago...and after my tenure at Avon and Revlon I went back to (WHO-BE-GOT) just in time for bankruptcy. My father's situation was, he was able to retire and then he worked part-time, and he was taking Social Security down at a law firm down on Wall St. So he was in good shape, as far as that goes.

RN: The thing that I saw when I got out of college and came back and was working for the city of New York, and I was still working in the Bronx, was that it looked like there were more people who were not working and were on

welfare, and that was their only subsistence. More and more where you only saw the mother and the kids, you never saw the guy, just the mother and the kids.

MN: So you grew up and intact families was the norm, would you say? Was that the reality, where most of the families on the blocks you lived in had a father present who was working?

RN: Unless someone died.

ET: It appeared that way.

JM: Even on the block kids... but for the large families as well, and you can look back at some of these large families whose kids went to public school. And you could say "OK, one brother died of an overdose, the other one went into the Muslims and did very well; one brother became a cop and the other an alcoholic. One thing I do want to say--when I was coming up, high school and college, you would hear politicians and you'd see this, I guess, on TV and radio--there was sort an aura that blacks were not working, they were on welfare, they were no good. You push them to the side, the same thing as the Spanish, it was mostly Puerto Rican at the time. I disagree with that. There was a large number of young men our age, at the time, who went into the service. I became an officer, I had college. I came out of the army a captain, but a lot of the Spanish kids went into the navy, and were proud and served in Vietnam. A lot of the black kids, they were in a good portion of the service. The armed forces were made up of these individuals who were not looking to go on welfare. They were looking to make the best of that

situation.

RN: But the economic and social forces, both the disappearance of the jobs that our fathers had, our families had in the fifties, and the single-host family household...

MN: Were there many girls on your block getting pregnant?

JM: Not in the fifties.

MN: Was that a big thing?

All: No.

RN; No, it was not.

MN: That was not happening in your era?

JM: You would see one here and there. I could name a name: Marjorie Partenger. But I think the guy that got her pregnant linked up with her.

MN: That was not a big issue.

ET: In those years, it was not a badge of honor to have a baby. I wasn't.

MN: Any further reflections that, looking back here, trying to make sense of things, and again remembering that this interview is going to be read not just this year; five years, ten years, twenty years, thirty years?

ET: Well, I remember that Crotona Park, back then, I considered to be on a par with Central Park, a lot smaller, of course. We played handball, there was a pool that was functioning that we went to in the summertime. There were family picnics.

RN: All the men would be out there either playing bacciball or handball on the court.

ET: And that changed into a time when you did not go into that park.

MN: It has been fixed up again.

ET: Well, it is the renaissance now.

MN: But in the seventies, it was dangerous?

ALL: Yes.

RN: It's fascinating, the more things go around, the more they come back.

You mentioned after school programs that used to run a P.S. 99, you know those--

MN: They were eliminated during the fiscal crisis.

RN: You know, they ended them for a period of time.

MN: They still are not anywhere near where they were.

RN: And now they are talking about now that it would be a great idea to have after school programs. Hey, they were doing them in 1951! [LAUGHTER]

MN: They had them in every elementary school.

RN: And they worked!

MN: Even the public schools, you could take home musical instruments in junior high school, if you were in the band.

JM: You know what is happening now in the Bronx, let me go back to, let's say, the forties, fifties, there were young men that I went to Iona with. There were projects in those days, and the guys would say "there was a house there that I was born in. My grandmother lives in those brownstones next to the projects. I lived there, but that's gone." I say "oh my God." And I feel a little funny because here I am, black, and my neighborhood is still there.

Well, there came a time when my house was gone, so I felt the same way that these kids felt. Now, my second sister lived up of Gun Hill Rd. in a private house, it was a nice neighborhood. There was a large West Indian presence then, but I'd say that it was a middle class West Indian presence, not what you have now. I remember my brother used to call that the "black belt", when the Jamaicans were coming up from Jamaica and moving in. Now that area is starting to deteriorate, and my niece got my sister out. They left, they're up in Socrates, New York, where Ron is, a little further north. What happened to our area is now happening to that area of the Bronx, to a greater extent.

MN: And now the south Bronx is starting to be rebuilt and could go the way of Harlem in about ten years.

JM: If the process continues, and I would like to see it continue.

MN: I am down there a lot, and you cannot believe the amount of new construction. There are cranes building on every block and--

JM: The irony, to me the ironic thing of it all is the original reason why people moved there was the location, and the ability to get into downtown Manhattan [SNAPS FINGERS] like that.

MN: I am trying to tell my students, if you are looking for a housing bargain, Mauritania is the place to go right now, because no one knows about it yet. In five years, it is going to happen. There is all the new housing being built, but there are still these brownstones which are beautiful, which are left on a few of the blocks, and then soon you are going to have your bar with plants

in the windows and your health food store.

ET: Well, two things are fortunate. Number one: heroin is no longer king. The kind of dependency heroin set up was that a person who was hooked on it virtually had to become a criminal. The substance was illegal, and for a variety of reasons. At least now, the drugs people are taking are less of a criminal-making type. The other thing is, you are in the proximity to Manhattan. Remember, I mentioned about my wife and me living in Yonkers and ended up moving here, not this house, but this area, and ended up paying less in capital interest and taxes than we would be paying in rent.

JM: The cynical part of me has to say that one of the reasons for the renaissance in the Bronx is the reality of the proximity to Manhattan, but also what facilitates it is not having the heroin.

MN: And also, then the crack epidemic which hit in the eighties, which also peaked. OK, any final words before we wind up and I head back to Brooklyn and you guys head back?

RN: I appreciate the kind of early childhood upbringing I had.

MN: I guess the thing about St. Anthony's is that--the thing I did not realize--how a remarkable place that was.

RN: It's a shame it ended, but St. Augustine is still there, Cardinal Hayes is still there.

JM: As a matter of fact, that's an interesting scenario that you bring up. I even had the occasion to go down to Cardinal Hayes a couple of weeks ago. One of my Irish buddies who knew another friend of ours contacted me, and

he sort of semi-retired, but he is working with the alumni there. And now the school is predominantly minority, they wear uniforms, they have their blazers and their beige pants like this. The student body is maybe one thousand, when I was there it was five hundred, but the school has been renovated. It is still there and the academic standards are still there. They are still trying to push the kids to college.

RN: As a matter of fact, I saw a thing on TV about Cardinal Hayes. It was a couple of years ago, their graduation rate's one of the best in the city, and the rate of the graduates going to college.

MN: I get Cardinal Hayes students. There is a lot of pride in being a Hayes student, still. There is a lot of *esprit de corps* associated with going to that school, still.

JM: You know, and you talk about building up. When I went there, I decided to take public transportation; I took the train over. The only thing that I really recognized was there when I went there was the Post Office. There is a new community college, Lincoln Hospital is now on 145th St.

MN: Yes, there is also a couple of hip restaurants there, there is a new bar associated with Giovanni's, there is a jazz bar called the G Bar on 150th off the Grand Concourse, which you would think would be in the village of Harlem. It is a very hip, upscale spot. And now on 138th St. there is a place called the Blue Ox which has poetry slams and jazz. So that area is starting, the spillover from Harlem is starting to happen. As I said, in five to ten years it is going to go into Mauritania, because Crotona Park is spectacular. I am a

tennis player, and they have the best public courts in the city and they have a professional tournament there every summer.