

Bronx Italian American History Initiative
Present: Kathleen LaPenta (Interviewer); JT (Interviewee)
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Location: Rose Hill, Fordham University, Bronx

KL: 00:00:00 Can you state your full name, your date of birth? Yeah. Today I'm Kathleen LaPenta, I'm here with the Bronx Italian American History Initiative, talking with [Joseph Tinari 00:00:18] of the Belmont neighborhood. Formerly of the Belmont neighborhood, you still live there?

JT: 00:00:23 Yeah, formerly, but I'm still here at least once a week.

KL: 00:00:26 Okay. All right. Would you state your name and your date of birth?

JT: 00:00:31 Sure. My name is Joe Tinari. Date of birth is October 10th, 1944. Born and raised in the neighborhood, right here, only a couple of blocks away as a matter of fact. Want me to give basically addresses, locations, and stuff?

KL: 00:00:31 If you'd like.

JT: 00:00:31 Yeah, sure.

KL: 00:00:49 Yeah. Seems like you have a very geographical memory of the area, so I'd love for you to start talking about that.

JT: 00:00:57 Sure. Originally, I was born in 2355 Beaumont Avenue. That's known as the elevator building, mainly because in the Belmont community, most of the buildings here have a limit of five floors. Anything over five floors, the city mandates that you have to have an elevator. I was born in the elevator building. People who were born in the neighborhood here don't know 2355 Beaumont; they know the elevator building.

KL: 00:01:27 It was the only building with the elevator in the zone?

JT: 00:01:27 The only building with the elevator.

KL: 00:01:27 Okay.

JT: 00:01:31 It was a large building, comprised of 2353, 2355. Approximately 60 apartments on each side, which was of course connected by a hallway. Therefore, those of us who were in that building, and

we had a lot of families who were raising their kids in that building, we all got to know each other and became very close. Even though it's two buildings, it was basically almost like 120 families living in the same house.

We all got to know one another. We all got to know what floor they were on, what apartments they were on. Therefore, when we went out to play, in those days it was safe just to go out and play in the street, or go out and play in the courtyard, go out and play in one of the empty lots. That's where we did most of our growing up. In fact, right here in Fordham University, this was one of our backyards.

KL: 00:02:32 It was.

JT: 00:02:33 Yeah. Unlike Fordham University is today, with everything taking up on Fordham Road, it was set back to 195th Street I believe. There was a fence there at the time, but it was always open. They basically never had a security guard on duty. Students would go in and out. At that time, the students would have housing on campus.

They discouraged the students from coming out into the neighborhood. I guess at that time it was basically a safety issue. Not only that, you had a lot of students coming from out of the area. The main concern of the parents at the time was that the kids were going to be safe. They wanted them staying on campus.

KL: 00:03:19 Okay. Was this when you were younger, was this 1950s or so?

JT: 00:03:22 When I was younger. This was during the '50s, yeah.

KL: 00:03:23 Okay. Parents were still concerned about safety and [crosstalk 00:03:26]

JT: 00:03:26 Yeah. I guess if you came from either California, some cases students came from overseas, the one thing that they wanted to make sure was that when they were sending their kid to school, that they wouldn't have to worry about their kid being in any kind of danger.

KL: 00:03:41 Because it was in the city, anyway? Okay.

JT: 00:03:43 Yeah, yeah.

KL: 00:03:45 Was the neighborhood unsafe? Did they have cause for concern?

JT: 00:03:48 Here?

KL: 00:03:48 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

JT: 00:03:48 This was the Belmont neighborhood. This was basically the safest neighborhood that you could go in. Mainly because not only were the parents always policing the children that were in their view, there was also an element of ... I don't want to say that they were gangsters, but there was an element where some people who didn't go to work were involved in taking numbers, and taking bets, and shylocking, and things like that. Those were what we called the neighborhood guys. They were out, almost near every candy store, or near every club.

KL: 00:04:30 Why the candy store? Any reason for the candy store?

JT: 00:04:31 Yeah. The candy store was a place for them to hang out. When you say candy store, you really wouldn't go in there and find a tremendous candy selection. It basically was a front for these guys to hang out in the back to play cards. Yeah, they did have a few ice cream sodas and stuff, but they were basically just fronts. The candy stores were out all over the neighborhoods, people always hanging out. The crime rate was practically zero.

KL: 00:04:59 Okay. This is when you were growing up still?

JT: 00:05:02 Yeah, growing up. You'd really have to be stupid to come into the neighborhood and commit a crime. If you did, and you were apprehended or caught, you were never turned over to the police.

KL: 00:05:17 Okay. Now did you know this when you were little, or was this something you came to learn afterwards?

JT: 00:05:17 No, we knew this as kids. We always knew the racket guys, and the racket guys always knew us. A lot of them gave us nicknames. Everybody had a nickname in the neighborhood. It was either the way you looked, or the way you acted, or where you were from. Everyone had a nickname. My nickname was Bingo. Up until today, when I go in the neighborhood now, when I go on Arthur Avenue, some of my friends will say, "Hey Bingo. How you doing?"

KL: 00:05:46 Oh really?

JT: 00:05:47 Yeah. A lot of people thought that that's my real name. Up until today, a lot of people don't know I have a first name. They think that that's my name.

KL: 00:05:54 Do you know what got you that nickname?

JT: 00:05:59 Yeah, sure. What got me that nickname is that, we were down playing one day, and in front of the building that we were at there was a candy store, and of course the guys would hang out there. They would sometimes just want to entertain themselves. One day they call me over. They says, "Do you want to make a quarter?" Now, a quarter is probably like \$5. I said, "Yes." He says, "Sing for us." I sang a song for them.

KL: 00:06:23 What song did you sing?

JT: 00:06:26 I don't ... I think it was Music, Music, Music. It went something along the lines like, "Put another nickel in, in the nickelodeon, all I want from loving you is music, music, music."

KL: 00:06:41 Okay.

JT: 00:06:42 The song, later on came out again during the '70s, and it became a disco song which was great. About 11 minutes.

KL: 00:06:50 You remember?

JT: 00:06:51 Yeah, yeah. Then I sang the song. Then a couple of days later they called be over, "Hey Bing Crosby, come over here."

KL: 00:06:56 Ah, okay.

JT: 00:06:57 I guess I got named after Bing Crosby, so they called by Bingo. Had nothing to do with the games or anything. Ever since then that name stuck. That's how I got my nickname.

KL: 00:07:09 Okay.

JT: 00:07:10 The neighborhood was basically very, very safe. It wasn't uncommon for us, while we were playing, that if one of the mothers would be passing by, if something was going on that mother would yell at us and discipline us. Of course, we would have to listen, because it was basically an extension of our

moms. We could never disrespect someone's mother. It just wasn't in our culture to do that. It was always respect.

Our neighborhoods were always very safe. It wasn't uncommon for us to go down during the day, in the morning, especially on a weekend or during the summer, early in the morning, play all day, play different games. We would play kick the can, and Johnny on the pony, stick ball. Every neighborhood, every street had their own stick ball team.

Actually, when I moved out of the area and I moved upstate, I had a city games event where I am now. I had a kick the can contest, a yo-yo context, and a stick ball contest. I was shocked that the people in upstate New York did not know what stick ball was. That's strictly a city game. When you grow up on the streets here you have to make use of everything around you. The street was there, a broom handle was there, and a rubber ball, a Spaldeen was there. We were able to have our stick ball games there.

Any abandoned properties, any abandoned lots would often been cleaned by actually, believe it or not, the racket guys would get someone in construction to come there and clean the empty lot. It didn't matter who owned the lot, the lot was basically cleaned so that the kids have a place to play.

KL: 00:08:59 Oh, okay.

JT: 00:09:00 Yeah, that was there [crosstalk 00:09:01]

KL: 00:09:02 It was almost like a care of the neighborhood type of thing.

JT: 00:09:03 Yeah, exactly. It was basically trying to keep the kids out of the street. They don't want them to get hit by the cars. If there was an empty lot they would just go there one day, and they would clear it with the big machines. We would have to go there with the rakes, rake up all the stuff. Then we had a lot to play in.

KL: 00:09:17 Okay. Oh, interesting.

JT: 00:09:19 Yeah. That's what we'd do. We did that in the green lot, we did that in the Beaumont lot. We had a lot of different lots that we would play in. It actually was dirt that we could play on. I think growing up we had, as I mentioned, all these areas ... Fordham University was our backyard. We would come in here. Along the

main entrance that you have down on 3rd Avenue, that was the main entrance at the time. Growing along there, there were a lot of chestnut trees. We would go in there. I don't think any of the chestnut trees exist anymore.

- KL: 00:09:49 No.
- JT: 00:09:49 During the 1960s, '70s, there was a chestnut blight that killed a lot of the chestnut trees.
- KL: 00:09:55 Killed all the chestnut trees, yeah.
- JT: 00:09:56 Yeah. That's why you really don't see chestnut trees here in New York anymore. We would go there and pick the chestnuts. We would drill a hole through the chestnuts, put it on a string, and then we would have so called chestnut competitions. We would hit the chestnut. If it didn't break, that person would try to break your chestnut. It went on and on. Every time you broke a chestnut your chestnut became one year older. Sometimes your chestnut might be 18 years old, or 20 years old.
- KL: 00:10:28 Oh, wow.
- JT: 00:10:28 Eventually they broke.
- KL: 00:10:29 To see when it broke [crosstalk 00:10:30]
- JT: 00:10:29 Yeah, they were all broken then. Some of us learned tricks. We would borrow our mother's nail polish and give it a coating of nail polish.
- KL: 00:10:37 Oh, the chestnut?
- JT: 00:10:37 On the chestnut, so it'd be a little harder, a little stronger. There's a lot of things we learned as kids. We also had the Botanical Gardens. This was basically our backyard every Wednesday. During the time when we went to elementary school, we would have a half a day on Wednesdays. The reason why we would have half a day on Wednesdays was because the Catholic kids going to public school would have what they call release time, or catechism classes.
- KL: 00:11:09 Okay. You were a Catholic kid going to public school?

JT: 00:11:12 No, no. I was actually, I started in the public school where there's Grace Dodge right now. That was PS74. I started there, kindergarten, first, and second grades. Then they changed it to Grace Dodge. The kids that were going there, we got shifted to the next closest school which was public school 32, 183rd Street and Beaumont Avenue. I went there for another two years. My parents weren't happy with the way I was coming home with no homework, and cursing, and stuff like that. They took me out and put me in the Catholic school, which was Mount Carmel.

KL: 00:11:12 You did go to Mount Carmel?

JT: 00:11:50 Oh yeah. This is the Mount Carmel Parish right here.

KL: 00:11:52 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Was Mount Carmel also your parish? Is that one of the reasons why they did that?

JT: 00:11:52 Yeah, yeah.

KL: 00:11:52 Okay.

JT: 00:11:57 It's the parish. Went to Mount Carmel and was there up until we graduated the eighth grade. Then from there I went to Mount Saint Michael, which is located on 231st Street, well basically 238th Street and Murdock Avenue. We would take the train right here on Fordham, or we would take the 41 right on Webster Avenue, and go to school there. Then when I finished high school, a lot of things started changing.

KL: 00:12:26 It's about 1962?

JT: 00:12:32 Yeah, right around it '62, '63, we started getting involved in Vietnam.

KL: 00:12:36 Ah, okay.

JT: 00:12:39 It wasn't really too good of a time. I didn't really know if I wanted to go to college or not. Mainly because in high school, actually it started in elementary school, when I was in the eighth grade, we would have dances. Like at Halloween, or we would have dances at Easter, Christmas, Valentine's Day. It was basically to get the Catholic school youth to ... We were always separated. The boys always had one school, and the girls had one school. We all went to Mount Carmel.

KL: 00:13:13 In Mount Carmel did you have Christian brothers, or did you have nuns?

JT: 00:13:18 We had nuns in the lower grades, and then brothers.

KL: 00:13:22 Christian brothers.

JT: 00:13:24 From I think the fifth grade up.

KL: 00:13:26 Once you go into adolescence, you had the Christian brothers.

JT: 00:13:27 Right, then they separated. The boys went to the boys' part, the girls went to the girls' part. We were able to get together at the dances. When we were in the seventh and eighth grade there would always encourage us to go to the dances. I tried going to a couple of dances, me and the guys. The bands really sucked. The bands were horrible. Of course, the nuns would put the bands in there. When it came to selling tickets, I think for the Easter one, they said, "Are you getting your ticket?" I says, "No. I'm not going to the dance." They says, "What do you mean you're not going to that?" I said, "The bands are horrible." I said, "Nobody wants those bands."

KL: 00:14:04 What were the band, what kind of music ...

JT: 00:14:05 They were like old music. It was terrible. There was no rock music there. It was just old kind of music, like maybe for your parents or something. What happened is I got in trouble for saying that, because everybody in the class ... They sent me down to the principal's office. I told the principal, I says, "I can't go because the bands are horrible."

This was, I don't remember, Mother [Aralia 00:14:29] or something. She says, "Well who do you recommend?" I says, "Well I do know a band." I says, "The Silvertones." I said, "They're really good." She told me, she says, "Okay. I'm going to let you put the band in there." I got in touch with the guys. She said to me, "But if they wriggle, or if they open their shirts on the stage, I'm coming after you."

KL: 00:14:52 Oh my gosh.

JT: 00:14:53 I said, "Okay." I told the guys, "Listen-"

KL: 00:14:55 Wait, how old were you?

JT: 00:14:57 I was in the eighth grade.

KL: 00:14:57 Okay. You were like 12.

JT: 00:14:59 12, yeah. I told my friends, "Come here and play." I says, "But listen, the nun here is crazy. She don't want you to open your shirt. Don't do any gyrations or anything." I said, "Because I'm going to get in trouble." The night went off really nice. The band went over well. The following year, when I'm a freshman, I get a call from the nun again.

She says, "Listen, we're having a dance here. We'd like you to put the bands in here." I had a few more bands, because I was always going to the dances. I went to Our Lady Of Solace, we would go to Tolentine. I would also go down to the black neighborhoods because I would always like the bands that they had a little better than [crosstalk 00:15:37]

KL: 00:15:37 Okay. Can you describe, I know people say rock and roll, but you can be specific about ...

JT: 00:15:41 It was more or less like ... You have to keep in mind that during the 1940s and after the war, right up until the 1950s, it was always the big bands. The big bands were in vogue. What happened is that the young people did not want that music.

KL: 00:15:41 Big band.

JT: 00:15:57 They wanted to find their own music. They started finding R&B. All the way down at the end of the stations, down at WWRL. They started finding stations in New Jersey that would really cater to the black audience.

KL: 00:16:10 Okay. That's the kind of music you liked, too?

JT: 00:16:12 That's the kind of music I liked. At that time, it was either called race music, or I don't even remember. It wasn't really accepted in mainstream.

KL: 00:16:21 Was it doo-wop? I hear some about doo-wop. Was it like doo-wop, or not?

JT: 00:16:26 Yeah, doo-wop came a little bit after, as a result of that. Doo-wop really came about because the radio stations wanted to

play music that wasn't so racist, and yet would be accepted by a lot of the parents.

- KL: 00:16:45 Okay. Doo-wop was the mix, the blend [crosstalk 00:16:50]
- JT: 00:16:49 Doo-wop was a mix, yeah. They did have their roots in R&B, did have their roots in music, but don't get me wrong, some great, great music came out of R&B. The early groups, the Flamingos, and the Moonglows, and the Five Satins, those groups that started what they call blow harmony, where they would come out and sing from their chest and sing from their stomach, and give really, really good music, those were all the foundations of what we call rock and roll.
- KL: 00:17:20 Okay. Where those groups in the Bronx, or were they ...
- JT: 00:17:22 No, most of them were situated either in Harlem, some of them came out of Philly, but it was mostly New York, Philly groups. Some came out of Detroit at that time. They started getting national attention. Here in New York we had a disc jockey by the name of Alan Freed, he's so called the godfather of rock and roll. Not that he sang or anything, but he actually played the music that the young people wanted. He brought to the young public ... He was originally on WINS, the all news station that you have here now. Everyone had that radio-
- KL: 00:18:00 Oh, yeah. 1010.
- JT: 00:18:00 1010 WINS, yeah. He always had that music playing. Every young person was listening to WINS and Alan Freed. He became very successful. He started having live shows at the Brooklyn Paramount, the Brooklyn Fox, all these large avenues where they would put on shows from basically 10:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night. They would show a movie. He would always have at least a dozen, maybe 15 groups come there. The groups were able to get their exposure. They were able to make a few dollars. We as kids were able to go there and see the groups.
- KL: 00:18:38 Right. You were able to know about it because you were listening to the radio?
- JT: 00:18:41 Listening to the radio.
- KL: 00:18:42 That's really how you came into this understanding that you knew ... It sounds like your access to it was first radio, and then

you understood how to go to the venues to see the concerts.
[crosstalk 00:18:53]

JT: 00:18:52 Exactly. I would seek out where they're playing, and so on. Then basically what happened is that the nuns call me, and they wanted me to put the bands in there.

KL: 00:19:01 For the dances?

JT: 00:19:02 Yeah, for the dances, so everything wasn't as bad as they originally threatened. I didn't have to worry too much about if they opened their shirts because I wasn't there anymore.

KL: 00:19:09 Right, right, right.

JT: 00:19:11 I started putting groups in there. Then I got also a call from another high school, Saint Barnabas High School, which is on 233rd Street, another Catholic high school. I started putting some of the bands in there. A friend of mine, his father owned a restaurant, Bronxwood Avenue, oh about 219th Street. It was called the Monterey Club.

We would go there. I mentioned to him, "Why don't you put a couple of bands in here? This way we have a place to go on the weekends." His father was really a great guy, Eddie, and he says, "Go ahead put the bands in." I was able to put a couple of bands in there. That started my sideline, my career as booking bands.

KL: 00:19:52 I was going to say, it sounds like by high school you had a career path sort of planned out for you.

JT: 00:19:54 Yeah. Not only did I have a handful of places to put the bands, I also had a number of bands calling me, looking for work.

KL: 00:20:04 Almost like what you said, like a bookie. They were [crosstalk 00:20:07]

JT: 00:20:06 Yeah, I became almost like an agent. At that point I started saying, "Well I'll get you a gig, but I have to get 10%." I started getting my commissions. I started learning about contracts, what was required. I also started going out, finding new venues for my bands to play in. At that time, the Monterey Club, first club that we put the bands in there, it was doing so well that his father said he's getting out of the Bronx and he's going up to Yonkers.

He bought an old steak house, and he wanted me to put the bands in there, which I did. At that time, this was a large venue, this was able to put at least a thousand people in there. I needed something a little bit more than bands. I started reaching out to the recording artists. At that time, a lot of the recording artists, I would be able to get them through the record label. I would have to call the record label, find out who the contact or who the manager was for the band. I started booking live shows-

KL: 00:20:06 At this Yonkers venue.

JT: 00:21:10 At this place. Yeah. This was called the Riviera Lounge. This was the first club that had live recording acts every Friday and Saturday night.

KL: 00:21:21 Okay. This was still in high school?

JT: 00:21:25 No, this was now-

KL: 00:21:25 After?

JT: 00:21:26 ... finishing high school and going into college. I wanted to keep busy while I was doing this. I was having fun doing the bands. It was great, I was making money. I started going to Bronx Community. I figured, let me go there and take a couple of courses. At the same time, the draft board got in touch with me, they started drafting 18, 19 year olds who weren't going to college. If you just graduated, within a year you were getting drafted. The only way to get a deferment at that time was be a full time student, so I took my full time courses there.

KL: 00:22:03 You did [crosstalk 00:22:04]

JT: 00:22:03 Figuring in a year or two this bologna in Vietnam is going to be over. Unfortunately, I got my associates Degree there, and the war was-

KL: 00:22:03 The bologna was not over.

JT: 00:22:13 ... escalating. It was escalating. What I did is I said, let me go down to Baruch College. Baruch was the business wing of city college. I went there. I got my bachelor's at Baruch.

KL: 00:22:29 Okay. You did four more years at Baruch, or you went and did two more years for your associate's?

JT: 00:22:35 No. All I had to do, I had to do about two and half years. What happened is that, while I was going at Bronx Community College, I took mostly liberal arts courses. I did specialize in marketing because I was in marketing. I was marketing myself, and I was marketing the groups, and I was marketing the clubs. I took marketing, which helped me. Then when I went to Baruch I did become a marketing major. I got my bachelor's at Baruch.

KL: 00:23:02 In what year?

JT: 00:23:05 That had to be, probably right around '67, '68. Unfortunately, the war was raging horrible now.

KL: 00:23:14 Still, yeah.

JT: 00:23:15 They were drafting college students who graduated. I had to try to find something to do. I knew one of the ... I was an altar boy here at Mount Carmel, while we were going to Mount Carmel. One of the priests became the pastor of a school in Harlem, on 104th Street, Saint Lucy's. I told him what was going on.

He said to me, "Well come over here. Why don't you teach, and I'll give you a deferment." I says, "What do you mean?" I says, "I don't know anything about teaching." He says, "Well it's very simple. It's a second grade class." He said, "But I can give you the position as a teacher, and you'll get a deferment, they can't touch you." It was perfect for me.

KL: 00:23:15 You did it, because you didn't ... Yeah.

JT: 00:23:59 It was perfect for me because it was a job that was, I thought, 9:00 to 3:00, a very easy job. I can still keep my booking of all the bands, which I did. I did that for four years, until 1970. It as '66 to '70. Then in 1970 the war was still going on. I said you know what, I'm teaching here four years ... You really don't make any money.

KL: 00:23:59 Right, it's hard work.

JT: 00:24:29 I believe my salary was \$3,600 a year, which I think it was either \$300 a month. Then the final year I think they went up to \$400

a month. I really didn't care because I was making money booking the bands.

- KL: 00:24:45 Right, right, with the main business.
- JT: 00:24:47 Yeah. To me I looked at it as a part-time job that was getting me a deferment. At that point then I said, well I have all this teaching under my belt, let me go into the public school system. I went into the public school system. That was in the year 1970. I round up really liking teaching.
- KL: 00:25:05 Oh, really?
- JT: 00:25:07 Yeah. I really-
- KL: 00:25:07 You always taught elementary school?
- JT: 00:25:09 I started in elementary school. Then I wound up going into the junior high school. I went into the, at that time it was called industrial arts. I was in the shop class. I had the shop class, I had my own homeroom class. I wound up staying teaching for the next 26 years.
- KL: 00:25:29 Oh, wow. Okay.
- JT: 00:25:30 Yeah. I retired there in 1992.
- KL: 00:25:32 From the public school system.
- JT: 00:25:33 From the public school system. By then the war was over, so didn't have to worry.
- KL: 00:25:33 Right, another war had started actually.
- JT: 00:25:39 Yeah. I didn't have to worry about getting drafted. It really turned out to be a blessing in disguise. I always tell young people, keep doing things. If you stay at home and watch television, if you just stay at home and play video games, you missing out on opportunities. I did not know I was going to be a teacher. I didn't even think about it, but I wound up going into a profession that I really loved. When you go into a profession that you love, you give it your all. Even until today, I still keep in touch with so many of the students that I had back in the day.

KL: 00:26:13 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Where did you teach in the public schools?

JT: 00:26:15 I taught in the public schools here in the Bronx. I started in PS90, which was Sheridan Avenue and 167th Street. Then I went into the junior highs. Most of my junior high career was in junior high 82, that's located on Sedgwick Avenue and Tremont. Tremont and Sedgwick. Right off there. Tremont University.

KL: 00:26:15 Okay. That's further north than the 167.

JT: 00:26:15 Yeah, yeah.

KL: 00:26:15 Okay.

JT: 00:26:40 It was very, very enjoyable, very, very nice. It was actually a great job. Meanwhile, I still kept booking the bands for all this time.

KL: 00:26:48 You did the booking stuff.

JT: 00:26:50 Yeah. I had a lot of different clubs, a lot of live shows. I did a lot of tours with groups. In college, right after Woodstock happened in '69, I was booking a lot of those bands, but once '69 came along and Woodstock came along, a lot of these groups went from \$700 a night to \$5,000 a night.

KL: 00:27:11 Oh.

JT: 00:27:13 What happened is it made it very difficult for colleges to book the bands. In fact, over here, I think they used to put everything in the Field House, do you still have a Field House here?

KL: 00:27:26 We have the Vince Lombardi ...

Speaker 3: 00:27:30 Yeah.

JT: 00:27:30 Center?

KL: 00:27:30 Yeah.

Speaker 3: 00:27:32 If we do concerts, usually outside on the lawn. [crosstalk 00:27:35]

KL: 00:27:35 Like on the lawn that's [crosstalk 00:27:36]

Speaker 3: 00:27:36 There's one by a freshman dorm, that has a pretty big lawn. We'll have a spring weekend.

KL: 00:27:39 That's where the spring one is.

Speaker 3: 00:27:46 Yeah.

JT: 00:27:46 What do they do if they need an indoor concert?

Speaker 3: 00:27:46 I don't think we do that.

JT: 00:27:46 Okay.

KL: 00:27:46 It doesn't happen as often.

Speaker 3: 00:27:46 Yeah.

KL: 00:27:47 One of my colleagues does them but has them in smaller venues.

JT: 00:27:51 Smaller venues.

KL: 00:27:51 Yeah. There just is not a large concert hall venue.

JT: 00:27:54 Yeah. You have to keep in mind, at that time, in order for a college to put on a college, the college wasn't going to pay. It came out of what they call student funds.

KL: 00:28:03 Yeah, or student activity [crosstalk 00:28:06] something like that.

JT: 00:28:06 Student activity, that's right. They were very limited. What we did is that, in 1970 we went to the colleges that we put a couple of the bands in here, and we said to them, "What's your budget?" Most of their budgets were kind of low.

KL: 00:28:06 Really low.

JT: 00:28:19 1,500. Most of the groups were like \$5,000. We told them, "Okay we're going to work this out with you. We'll bring the venue in here. What we'll do is, all the proceeds have to go to us, because we're going to put a \$5,000 group in here, and we can't have you give us \$1,500 and you make the money." We would work the tickets.

What we did was also, we started a company called National Campus Concerts. What we did is that we would obtain sponsorships. Pepsi, Love Cosmetics, Miller High Life beer, which we had problems, some colleges with that ... That's a different story. We would get the sponsors. We would tell the sponsor, "You come in here, pay for this act. What we would do is we would put your logo, and we would put your brand, this concert is sponsored by Pepsi."

- KL: 00:29:10 Yeah, like the branding. Yeah.
- JT: 00:29:10 Right. We were able to do that for a while. We did it for about two years, until we could no longer do it. There were too many restrictions, restraints.
- KL: 00:29:18 Conflicts.
- JT: 00:29:19 Yeah, conflicts going on. We did that. I was able to get to so many colleges, all over the east coast. Everything from Syracuse, to Boston. We went down to Pittsburgh. We did so many concerts. You have to keep in mind, I was still teaching at the time. I would have a lot of extended three, and four day weekends that I couldn't go to school. Everything worked out. My whole career, between teaching and putting on the shows and the acts was great. I mean, wonderful.
- KL: 00:29:49 Well, you talked about being an altar boy at Mount Carmel. You talked about deferment, and seeking deferment. I was curious to know if you had friends who also sought ... If that was what you and your friends were doing?
- JT: 00:30:02 No. Most of my other friends either went into the service ... You had to keep in mind is that, not too many of us here, in the neighborhood, went to college. Most of us, once we finished high school it was time for us to go out and work. Those that went out to work, a lot of-
- KL: 00:30:19 Because they needed to earn, to bring the money back to the family, right?
- JT: 00:30:24 Bring money back to the family, yeah. Keep in mind, when you graduate high school, I believe you're about 17, 18. You're out there, you're a wage earner, and you're bringing home to the family. A lot of my friends wound up joining the army, or the navy, or whatever they joined. A lot of them went into the

reserves, which means they have to serve six months, but two weekends for a number of years.

KL: 00:30:45 Yeah, my dad was in the reserves.

JT: 00:30:48 Everything was all good on that. A couple of my friends, my friend Charlie from Beaumont, he got killed. He never came back. My friend Orlando.

KL: 00:30:55 They went to Vietnam?

JT: 00:30:56 Yeah, they went to Vietnam. Orlando from [inaudible 00:30:58] he died. We knew a couple of people that died, that went there and came back like that. It wasn't really a good time. During the '60s, I mean you talk about division in a country now, division in the country during the '60s was terrible.

On one hand, you're going to Vietnam, so you want to support the troops. Then on the other hand, you're against the war. If you're sending troops there, you're not good because you're supporting the war effort. There was so much tension that we as young people growing up had to deal with. Kennedy gets killed in '63. Martin Luther King gets killed in '68 or '69. Robert Kennedy gets killed. Malcolm X gets killed. There was a lot of violence also at this time. The Bronx was going through a lot of changes at this time also.

KL: 00:31:48 Yeah. Sorry, you were living in the Bronx at this time.

JT: 00:31:50 Yeah, sure, yes.

KL: 00:31:51 While you were working, and going to school, and teaching, and all that stuff.

JT: 00:31:53 Yeah, yeah.

KL: 00:31:54 Okay. Continue. I didn't [crosstalk 00:31:55]

JT: 00:31:55 Yeah, yeah. I was still living here. I was seeing the changes. I noticed that our neighborhood, our neighborhood right here as safe, but if you would go 10 blocks down to Fulton Avenue, they were burning the buildings.

KL: 00:32:09 They were. It was that close?

JT: 00:32:11 Yeah, it was that close. It was actually Tremont Avenue, almost the dividing line, where if you went down lower than Tremont Avenue, especially areas down there, Fulton Avenue, and Lafayette, and those areas, they was trouble down there. A lot of gangs were starting to form.

KL: 00:32:27 Those were the mostly black neighborhoods? Were they black and Hispanic at that time?

JT: 00:32:30 They were changing neighborhoods. They were neighborhoods that were becoming Hispanic, neighborhoods that were becoming black. A lot of the people who lived there previously were moving elsewhere. We sort of started seeing it here in Belmont also. Where Tremont used to be the boundary line, now it was a little further up. Maybe it was 183rd Street, and so on and so forth.

KL: 00:32:56 Oh, okay. It was encroaching [crosstalk 00:32:56]

JT: 00:32:55 The neighborhood was becoming a smaller neighborhood, but it was also becoming a tighter neighborhood. Those people who were able to move out of the neighborhood did so. A lot of them moved up to Westchester, or New Jersey. Some of them went to Co-op City, some of them went up to Riverdale. Those successful families that were able to move out did so.

A lot of the other families took a little longer to move out. Also keep in mind that we as young people were no longer kids. Now we're in our late teens. We were also looking to get out of the neighborhood and move out. Basically, when they talk about change of the neighborhood, that's what it really was. A lot of us grew up and moved out of the neighborhood thinking the pastures were better elsewhere.

I did. When I got married I moved to, first it was Jerome Avenue, and then I moved over into the country club section, which is Pelham Bay, a very nice two family home and all that. I was still teaching, so I was still traveling all the time, back and forth here. Of course, the school was very close, it was on Tremont and University. I would always stop in the neighborhood. I would always stop here, go to one of the local candy stores, a pastry shop, go to a sandwich shop. In fact, many times while I was teaching, I would shoot down during lunch, go to one of the deli's here, get a sandwich, and then bring it back and eat it in the lunchroom.

KL: 00:34:23 Okay. You were teaching in neighborhoods that were different from this neighborhood?

JT: 00:34:27 Different but not different, because the kids were the same. The kids were still playing stick ball, the kids were still playing kick the can. They were still playing basically the same games. I didn't realize it later on, that basically I was born and raised in somewhat like an Italian ghetto, but the kids that I'm teaching, same as me except it's a Hispanic ghetto, or it's a black ghetto. It's basically the same thing.

It's caring for your neighborhood, keeping your neighborhood safe, and caring for your neighborhood. A comradery between all your friends. Of course, you didn't want any encroachment from other neighborhoods. Even though you're living here and there's another group three or four blocks away, sometimes they became your enemies. Sometimes there would be neighborhood fights.

As you get older you realize that that's not the way it is. It's better to have a handshake, and it's better to live with one another. We learn from one another. All the different cultures learn from one another. I learned that very young, dealing with the groups that I was booking into the clubs.

KL: 00:35:32 Right, you were going out of the neighborhood early.

JT: 00:35:35 Yeah, I saw that. My love for R&B music was really a love for black music, and how they sang the song. A lot of times I would bring these groups into what they call white clubs. Of course the club owners many times would be angry with me. "What are you doing?" But when they saw the cash at the end of the night, because thousands of young people would come out to see the groups, it would offset it. They always would want, initially try to ask me to put in a white group for them. Then after a while they understood that when you put the good groups in ...

KL: 00:36:12 The white groups just weren't as good.

JT: 00:36:13 Yeah. I mean but there were fewer and far between. You had Dion who came right from the neighborhood, a very, very loved and well-known group. He broke up right in the late '50s, so I booked the Belmonts a number of times. They're still working in the clubs, the Belmonts. Dion still does his concerts, mostly in casinos now. We also had another group called the Regents. We

had Jay and the Americans, we had the Tokens from the
concourse. We had a lot of white groups here that did very, very
well.

KL: 00:36:47 That had a lot of success.

JT: 00:36:47 Right.

KL: 00:36:47 Those groups were really doo-wop groups?

JT: 00:36:49 Yes, those were all doo-wop groups. Yeah. They came about-

KL: 00:36:51 Yeah, okay. Which is what you explained, is this kind of medium
between what was considered race music versus what was
tolerable in a white setting, or by white people.

JT: 00:37:02 Right. A lot of things also came into play with the music. You
have to keep in mind, during the 1960s, that was the birth of
Motown. That also led to the music being accepted in almost
every venue.

KL: 00:37:02 Like changing tastes.

JT: 00:37:19 When you get the Supremes, and the Temptations on The Ed
Sullivan show, and your parents are home watching them, and
they enjoy them, then you know ...

KL: 00:37:28 Then there's the mainstream thing going on. Yeah.

JT: 00:37:30 Then they're mainstream, yeah.

KL: 00:37:31 In your family, are you an only child? Did you have siblings?

JT: 00:37:34 No, I have an older brother who actually graduated Fordham.

KL: 00:37:38 Oh, yeah. Okay.

JT: 00:37:39 Yeah, a professor.

KL: 00:37:39 What year did he graduate?

JT: 00:37:40 He's a professor. He's retired now. He majored in economics. He
wound up becoming the head of the economics department in,
oh god, I forget the college. I believe it was somewhere in New

Jersey. He'll kill me if he sees me. Anyway, he's really the smart one.

KL: 00:37:40 We can edit that out if you want.

JT: 00:37:40 He's the smart one.

KL: 00:38:02 Okay.

JT: 00:38:03 My mom was a worker here in the cafeteria.

KL: 00:38:07 At Fordham?

JT: 00:38:08 Fordham, yeah.

KL: 00:38:09 Oh.

JT: 00:38:09 Mainly because, by her being a worker, my brother's tuition was half price.

KL: 00:38:14 Oh, okay. Okay.

JT: 00:38:15 That was one of the perks.

KL: 00:38:17 Right.

JT: 00:38:17 She started working here when he was like a senior in high school. Then by the time it was time for me, I really didn't want to go to Fordham. I was too busy playing with the bands. I wound up finishing my bachelor's at Baruch. Then I wound up getting my masters at Lehman.

KL: 00:38:40 While teaching?

JT: 00:38:40 Yeah. Basically, at that point I really started enjoying going to college. I was able to rub shoulders with people always smarter than me. I would learn from them. Then, even after I got my masters, I wound up taking another half dozen ... I'm about six credits shy of my doctoral degree.

KL: 00:39:00 Oh, really?

JT: 00:39:02 Yeah.

KL: 00:39:02 In education?

JT: 00:39:03 Yeah. In education, yeah.

KL: 00:39:03 Okay. Very cool.

JT: 00:39:05 Then again, after all of that I sort of branched out. I started finding other interests, into botany, and I like learning about plants and stuff like that. Even until today, if there's in service course, I'll probably take a course. I took a lot of courses on [crosstalk 00:39:23]

KL: 00:39:22 You like learning. Education was important in your family.

JT: 00:39:24 Yeah, yeah. Always, yeah. My younger brother wound up going to Fordham Prep here. He did a few years in the college. He didn't get his degree. My younger sister, she went to Saint Catherine's Academy. Then she became a registered nurse. She's a registered nurse, still until today.

KL: 00:39:46 There are four siblings in your family.

JT: 00:39:47 Yes, four.

KL: 00:39:49 We were going to talk a little bit about your parents.

JT: 00:39:49 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

KL: 00:39:51 Your mom worked in the cafeteria here in Fordham.

JT: 00:39:53 Yeah.

KL: 00:39:53 Were your parents born in Italy?

JT: 00:39:55 My father was born in Italy. He came here during the late 1930s. His biggest gripe-

KL: 00:40:07 He came during fascism?

JT: 00:40:08 Yeah. He came here then. He was the oldest of one, two, three, oldest of five siblings. What he did, was he had to be the first one coming to America, to so called set up for the others to come in.

KL: 00:40:26 He had no other family that had already come? Your father was the first to come of his family?

JT: 00:40:32 Exactly. He was the first to come, but very soon after that my grandparents came, his parents. They were able to get an apartment.

KL: 00:40:41 They came to the Bronx? They came to Belmont?

JT: 00:40:45 They came right to Arthur Avenue. They came to Arthur Avenue mainly because it seemed like this was the area where many Italian immigrants came. Not only did we have to many people who were from Italy, but so many of the stores spoke Italian. Our doctor spoke Italian. Mount Carmel had masses in Italian.

KL: 00:41:06 They still do, yeah.

JT: 00:41:07 Yeah, yeah. Evidently it was a good place to move to start your life.

KL: 00:41:14 Where did your father's family come from in Italy?

JT: 00:41:16 They came from an area called Guardiagrele which is in ... Let me see if I can explain it. It was in Abruzzi.

KL: 00:41:26 Oh, okay.

JT: 00:41:26 Abruzzi. They came from the mountain areas in Abruzzi.

KL: 00:41:31 A lot of the people from this neighborhood are Abruzzese.

JT: 00:41:33 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes. When he came here, he was working in construction until he got drafted, right around-

KL: 00:41:41 For World War II?

JT: 00:41:43 Yeah, World War II. He got drafted. Then at that time both of my uncles came here, because they were next to come. They also got drafted. They all served in the service.

KL: 00:41:54 Where did they serve, starting with [crosstalk 00:41:56]

JT: 00:41:55 My father served in Guam. He was in the navy. My two uncles, one was a mechanic on the ships. Not on the ships, one was a mechanic and the other one was a soldier, and both of them were in the army. My father was stationed in Guam because he wound up getting a position in refrigeration. When the ships came into dock, his job was to go in there and do maintenance

on all the refrigeration systems. That was his thing there. He saw some-

KL: 00:42:30 Do you know what years he was in Guam?

JT: 00:42:32 He was there right up until the end of the war.

KL: 00:42:34 Okay, so '43, '44, '45?

JT: 00:42:36 Yeah. Right up until the end of the war, all of them were there, which is actually another step in the neighborhood, all the soldiers coming out between 1945 and 1947 it was not uncommon for us to have a party because someone was coming home.

KL: 00:42:53 Oh, okay.

JT: 00:42:55 We would have parties quite often. A lot of guys-

KL: 00:42:58 A lot of people from the neighborhood were in the war effort in World War II.

JT: 00:43:01 Yeah. Keep in mind, they had no choice.

KL: 00:43:03 Right, right. They were drafted.

JT: 00:43:05 When you're drafted, you're drafted. That was it. Plus the nation was at war. Everyone basically went in.

KL: 00:43:14 Your father was in the Pacific front. Did your uncles go to the European front? Did they-

JT: 00:43:17 Yeah, they were both in Europe. Both of them were in Europe. I don't really know how much action either of them saw because the war, for some reason, was never a good thing to talk about. None of them really like to talked [crosstalk 00:43:31]

KL: 00:43:30 Okay. In terms of their memory of the war ...

JT: 00:43:33 Yeah. I think it was a subject that they thanked God it was behind them. I think a lot of them had a lot of built up frustrations about what happened during the war, what they may have seen. They never really talked about it. My dad did mention the navy. He definitely wanted us all to go to college so we would have college degrees.

KL: 00:43:56 He had not gone to college, your dad?

JT: 00:43:57 He hadn't gone to college.

KL: 00:43:58 Okay. Neither had your mom?

JT: 00:43:59 No. My mom was born here.

KL: 00:44:01 In the Bronx?

JT: 00:44:03 Right on Beaumont Avenue.

KL: 00:44:03 Oh, really?

JT: 00:44:04 Yeah. Right on Beaumont Avenue. My mom and dad met and fell in love, decided to stay here in the Bronx because after the war my father wanted a position that he could make sure he had a steady job, he wound up going to the US Postal Service. He became a mail carrier in Manhattan. My mom had the responsibility of raising the children.

KL: 00:44:31 Right, so she was a homemaker until she needed to go get a job.

JT: 00:44:33 She was a homemaker. In those days a homemaker was homemaker. You had to wash the clothes, and take care of the kids, and make sure they don't get hurt, and cook the food, and do the shopping.

KL: 00:44:43 I'm like, that's what I do.

Speaker 3: 00:44:46 [inaudible 00:44:46] full time job, yeah.

KL: 00:44:48 It's still just like that.

JT: 00:44:48 It's still ... Sounds familiar.

KL: 00:44:50 Yeah, yeah.

JT: 00:44:52 Yeah. Anyway, well we had four kids, my parents had four kids. We were living in a three-room apartment in the elevator building.

KL: 00:45:00 Wow, okay. That was a very tight space.

JT: 00:45:02 Yeah. When my sister was born my father said it's time that we try to get something a little bigger. We wound up finding a home right here on Cambreleng Avenue. We moved into a two family-

KL: 00:45:15 Did you buy, or were you renting?

JT: 00:45:17 My dad bought.

KL: 00:45:17 He bought. Okay.

JT: 00:45:18 He bought it. He bought the two family. He was able to rent out the first floor. We took, one, two, three, four, we had the five rooms upstairs. My sister had her own room.

KL: 00:45:31 You had a much bigger house then?

JT: 00:45:32 Oh yeah. I had my own room, and my brother, John, and my brother, Frank, shared a room. My parents had their own room. We had a large living room, a large kitchen. It was very nice. The things I remember most about the neighborhood is that when we were growing up, while my mom was doing the cooking, or doing the cleaning, my grandmother would be there almost daily.

KL: 00:45:53 Yeah, I was going to ask, you said it was like living in a building with just one big family, but did you actually have family members that lived in the building? Or were they nearby?

JT: 00:46:03 I didn't have family members living, but it wasn't uncommon for grandma to almost be there every day.

KL: 00:46:05 Okay, because she was close too.

JT: 00:46:07 Especially because, you got to keep in mind, my brother was 18 months older than me, then me, then my brother John was a kid. My sister, Jean, was on her way. My grandmother would be there basically to come over and take the kids out of my mom's hair while she did everything.

KL: 00:46:07 Your mom was ...

JT: 00:46:26 I would go shopping with grandma every day.

KL: 00:46:28 Okay. This is your mom's moms who [crosstalk 00:46:31]

JT: 00:46:30 No, this is my father's mom.

KL: 00:46:32 Oh, okay.

JT: 00:46:32 My mom's mom, both of them passed away at an early age. My mom had no living relatives.

KL: 00:46:39 Okay. It was your father's family who was really working to support you.

JT: 00:46:43 My father's family, yeah. I would go shopping constantly with my grandmother. She would take me to the vegetable stores, the fruit stores, the market. She would always show me how to shop. When we went into the pastry shops everybody would give me a cookie.

KL: 00:47:02 [crosstalk 00:47:02]

JT: 00:47:02 Yeah. When you go into the vegetable stores at that time, when you bought spinach, or you bought broccoli or something, we had no plastic bags. They would get old newspapers, roll it up, wrap it up in the newspaper, and put it in the shopping bag that you brought with you. Very similar to what's going on today. Everything seems to have recycled itself.

KL: 00:47:22 Because they're trying to get out of plastic, yeah.

JT: 00:47:24 Yeah. You would bring your own shopping bag, or your own cart, put the food in that. Go home, bring it to mom, and she would cook it, prepare it for us. I have to really that my mom and my grandmother for letting me get to know the neighborhood so well. I got to know all the store owners.

KL: 00:47:24 You did?

JT: 00:47:43 Yeah, sure. Even as I became older, in my teens, I still would know them. They would know me because they saw me growing up in the neighborhood. Up until about 20 years ago I would still know many of them. Unfortunately, a lot of them passed away. Some of the stores, the children have been taking over. You go to Artuso's, right now he has the third generation working in Artuso's Pastry Shop. I went to school with Vinny, Anthony, Joey Artuso. Those are the sons of the original owners. I still go there, and I still see them.

KL: 00:48:23 Oh, you do?

JT: 00:48:26 Yes. Their company has really spun off into something amazing. What happened is that Mr. and Mrs. Artuso had the pastry shop, and of course the Italian ices. Then Anthony and Joey went on to stay there after their parents passed, continued the pastry shop. They expanded it a little bit. They now have a little café, and things like that. Anthony and Joey's children are now running it, in their 20s, and they established an online business. They're shipping their cannoli cream, and their pastries all over the world.

KL: 00:49:00 Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's almost like a merchandising ...

JT: 00:49:02 Yeah. Basically, you have to keep in mind, in today's world you have to really adapt to-

KL: 00:49:09 They've been entrepreneurial?

JT: 00:49:10 Yeah.

KL: 00:49:11 Okay.

JT: 00:49:11 You have to adapt to what's going on. That's a perfect example of what they've done to adapt. Mike's Deli is another one. You can order food, and he'll deliver it, basically almost anywhere. Off-site catering events. The people in the market, a lot of those little ... The market was enclosed originally because so many of the vending stands would be on the street during the inclement weather. Mayor La Guardia, at that time, brought them all inside. He put a top over it. The market is still there, but originally the market was made up of dozens of different vendors.

KL: 00:49:49 Like had kiosks, almost? Yeah.

JT: 00:49:51 They were actually pushcarts that they would sell their goods from.

KL: 00:49:56 They would just bring them inside?

JT: 00:49:56 Bring them inside, store them inside. Some of them would even have a place where you could leave them overnight and not have to bring it home.

KL: 00:50:04 Were a lot of the vendors, like the vegetable vendor, was he growing those vegetables?

JT: 00:50:08 No.

KL: 00:50:08 Where was he getting them from?

JT: 00:50:10 Getting them from the Bronx Terminal Market, even back in the day. It's not where it is now, it was in a different location. Now Bronx Terminal Market I think is in Hunts Point. At that time it was located on 138th Street and 3rd Avenue.

KL: 00:50:27 Okay. Right across the bridge, basically, from Manhattan.

JT: 00:50:30 Yeah, it was actually under.

KL: 00:50:32 Underneath.

JT: 00:50:33 Even maybe a little further up, down maybe in the 150s if I recall properly. I knew it wasn't too far from Yankee Stadium, because we would go there all the time as kids also. Those places, a lot of those vendors, if they started doing well, they would open up actually a vegetable store on 187th Street.

KL: 00:50:55 A storefront. Okay.

JT: 00:50:56 A lot of those are gone now also, but some are still there.

KL: 00:50:59 What are some of the names that you ... Did they have names, those storefronts? Do you remember any of them?

JT: 00:51:03 Well right where I came, right out of our building, we would go down to 187th Street. Right on the corner we had the dry cleaners, and right next store was Tony's Fish Market. Tony lived in our building. We knew when he came home because the elevator always smelled [crosstalk 00:51:19] fish.

KL: 00:51:19 Smelled like fish.

JT: 00:51:19 We always knew when he went home after work. He would be there. Then we had a fruit store. We also had the Capri restaurant. Then we had [Izzy's 00:51:31] Dry Good Store. Then we had Artuso's at the end of the block. We knew all the stores. We knew the stores across the street. Terranova Bread is still there. Terra Nova, making their great bread. In fact, today's

Wednesday, they make what they call a pizza bread. That's the round bread with the hole in it. They make it on a Wednesday. They usually put it out mostly for delivery, and in the afternoon. When I go there, I go in the back where the ovens are.

KL: 00:51:56 Oh, you do?

JT: 00:51:57 Yeah. I get a loaf and I put it in the bag, and I go out to the front.

KL: 00:51:57 Oh, that's nice.

JT: 00:52:00 I still get my bread nice and fresh, hot out of the oven. Artuso's is still there. DeLillo's is there, Egidio's is there. There's a lot of the stores that are still there.

KL: 00:52:08 That are still there, that have [crosstalk 00:52:14]

JT: 00:52:13 A lot of stores opened up with the second generation. Casa Della Mozzarella, that's really a good place to get a fresh cheese, is in Mozzarella. That's right near the Full Moon Pizza. The Full Moon changed about 25 or 30 years ago. They used to be known as the Half Moon. That was really a good pizza place, and a really good restaurant. Then something happened. I don't know if they sold it, or they had a conflict, but those owners were gone. Then the new people wanted to keep some sort of theme with the moon. They couldn't name it Half Moon, so they just changed it to Full Moon. Everyone just knows it-

KL: 00:52:49 As just the pizzeria?

JT: 00:52:49 ... as the Full Moon Pizza now, yeah.

KL: 00:52:50 Okay, okay.

JT: 00:52:51 That's what happens there. As far as living in this neighborhood, it was great. I mean so many of my friends are still around, thank God. In the elevator building we had Nicki Red in E5, and we had Tubby down on the first floor.

KL: 00:53:06 These are your friends and their nicknames?

JT: 00:53:07 These are my friends. Yeah, Nicki Red because he had red hair. Tubby because he was chubby. You had Little Joe on the third floor. We had Jerry Coco on the first floor. I mean we had so many ...

KL: 00:53:19 Mostly guys. Mostly male that you were friends with?

JT: 00:53:21 Yeah. When you've got-

KL: 00:53:22 It as guys.

JT: 00:53:23 Yeah, of course. If a girl had to hang out with us, she had to be a tomboy.

KL: 00:53:26 Okay. Let's talk about that. What kinds of things did the girls do? How did you differentiate in terms of gender?

JT: 00:53:32 The girls had their own clique, their own crew of things. They would of course hang out on the stoop; the stoop is the front of the building. At that time transistor radios were really good. Transistor were about the size of our cell phones.

KL: 00:53:47 [crosstalk 00:53:47] just listen to the music.

JT: 00:53:47 We were able to have mobile music. That was great. The girls, once in a while would hang out with us, once in a while would play with us, but you really had to be tough to play with the boys. We did a lot of climbing, and a lot of jumping. We would come into the Botanical Gardens, of course sneak in because I think even then they charged a nickel or a dime to get in, but we would never pay. We would just sneak in. There was always a bent bar that we'd be able to sneak in. We would always go late in the day, like 3:00, because at 5:00 security goes home.

KL: 00:54:26 You didn't have to worry about it.

JT: 00:54:27 After 5:00 you had the whole park to yourself. We had places known as the pines. The pines where were a lot of pine trees where growing, and the needles would fall down. There would be a big rock there, and we would jump off the rock, into the needles, which was like a nice cushion. We would go down to the Bronx River. Bronx River actually connected the Botanical Gardens to the Bronx Zoo.

We were able to get into a cement mixer that we would always hide, and get into the cement mixer, and you can go into the Bronx Zoo. The Bronx Zoo kept security on a little later because they had security that would watch the animals at night. Even then you would know where their route was, and you'd be able to have the whole park to yourself. Run around, play football in

there. Go into the Bronx Zoo, sees the animals without paying an admission.

- KL: 00:55:15 You guys didn't have, there was no curfew that you had?
- JT: 00:55:18 Yeah, we all had to be home to eat. You had to be home to eat. That was the one thing that was implanted in our heads. It was either at 6:00, or when your father got in from work, you had to be at the table.
- KL: 00:55:30 Okay, so 6:00, around.
- JT: 00:55:32 Whatever we did, 6:00 was when we basically all had to scam and get home. There was one incident that ... I mean we were doing this for years as kids, and we never got caught until we were in the cement mixer one day. Something was going on, my friend Vinny stood up and he fell in the water. This is cold. This is like in October, November. Everything was wet on him. He was really, really bad. He could not tell his mother because he would get his ass kicked. What we did is, in the lot we made a big bonfire. We told him to go up against there and dry off.
- KL: 00:56:06 Stand next to it, yeah.
- JT: 00:56:07 We were able to go back quickly and try to-
- KL: 00:56:07 He probably smelled when he got home. She probably wondered ...
- JT: 00:56:10 As soon as he walked in the door, he smelled like a dirty fire. We were hearing the yelling because we stood outside. "I told you not to go and blah blah blah."
- KL: 00:56:21 Oh, no.
- JT: 00:56:24 He had to tell his mother who he was with.
- KL: 00:56:27 Oh, you-
- JT: 00:56:27 We all basically got in trouble.
- KL: 00:56:29 Oh, no. What were you, like 10? Is that about, right?

JT: 00:56:32 We were, yeah, 10, 11. For like two weeks he wasn't allowed to hang out with us. We all got in trouble, but that was part of it. What the heck, it was a great experience.

KL: 00:56:45 Then, those friends, did they stay, as you stayed in the neighborhood until ... When did you officially move out of the neighborhood?

JT: 00:56:53 I officially moved out of the neighborhood probably in my late teens, early 20s. When I got married, I moved out. Most of my friends-

KL: 00:57:03 Like 1967? Is that right?

JT: 00:57:05 This was probably in 1972, '71, '72. Yeah, right around there. Right around the 1970s, I moved out. All my friends moved out.

KL: 00:57:05 They did?

JT: 00:57:18 Yeah. We basically tried to keep in touch with each other. Now we still keep in touch with each other. Every three months we do have what we call like a neighborhood reunion. We all meet at Antonio's. Antonio's is a great restaurant. Crescent Avenue and probably 185th Street, right on the corner, really, really good food. Good cooking there.

KL: 00:57:38 You come into the neighborhood to ...

JT: 00:57:38 Yeah we come into the neighborhood. We usually come on, it's either the first Friday or the second Friday of every quarter. The next one I think we're going to be doing now, January, March, I think we're going to do it in April. I think first week in April, or right around then we'll meet again at Antonio's. It's been going nicely. We started out with maybe six, seven of us. Then each of us brings somebody or tells somebody. It's nice. We go there, we reminisce about the old times.

KL: 00:58:09 Does that network exist primarily because you continue to sort of, one person talks to another, and it's like a web network?

JT: 00:58:09 Yeah.

KL: 00:58:16 Or does it exist also because of social media, or email?

JT: 00:58:20 Yeah. What happened is a lot of us got lost in contact. We didn't know where we were, but thanks to Facebook most of us reconnected.

KL: 00:58:26 You've been able to reconnect, okay.

JT: 00:58:26 Yeah. Most of us reconnected. I find myself, every once in a while, reaching out on people that I knew as a kid. I just put their name up on Facebook once in a while to see if they're around. I've been able to re-hook with a lot of people. I've mainly been re-hooking up with a lot of my former students. I got together with them a couple of times also.

KL: 00:58:48 You did, that's nice.

JT: 00:58:50 Yeah, yeah. That's nice. I mean thank God, Facebook for that, even though Facebook now is for old people.

KL: 00:58:50 Yeah, right? It's outdated.

JT: 00:58:54 Yeah, but it's good. At least old people are on that, that we can reconnect with people. You go along with the flow.

KL: 00:59:10 It sounds like you did a lot of ... You were in Belmont, but you were also in other neighborhoods.

JT: 00:59:10 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

KL: 00:59:16 Did you know about other Italian neighborhoods?

JT: 00:59:19 Oh yeah, sure. I would often go, as a youngster, to dances at Our Lady of Solace, which is on Morris Park Avenue, which was another hub. There was also another small hub way down on 156th Street, a small hub of Italian people where a restaurant known as Alex and Henry's, that was down there.

There was a place right on, it was probably Southern Boulevard and maybe 176th Street. It was called New Terrace Gardens. You had to go up a flight of steps, but they would always have good dances there. Sometimes I would go alone on a weekend, because nobody wanted to go there. They thought it was a bad neighborhood, but I would often go there alone and meet wonderful people, especially girls. That's why I went there. I would go out of the neighborhood. It wasn't uncommon for me to go out of the neighborhood.

KL: 01:00:16 Did your parents know that? Did they talk to you about that at all? Or did you just kind of keep them ...

JT: 01:00:19 Yeah, they wouldn't want me ... Yeah. I had to keep them kind of secret. No matter what I was basically a good kid. I was home when they wanted me. I stayed out of trouble with the police. So long as I basically went to school all the time, and tried to do my best in school, and not hurt anybody, not get hurt, take care of yourself, my parents would basically let me, if I had to go out on a weekend, go. I still had to be home at a certain time.

KL: 01:00:50 You knew that they wouldn't have liked you going into some of the neighborhoods where you were going?

JT: 01:00:54 Some of the neighborhoods, they might not have liked it. Or they might have said, "Well if you're going to go there you have to go with a couple of friends."

KL: 01:01:00 Okay. Can I ask you, would they have been apprehensive about that primarily because of this idea of this myth as certain neighborhoods being unsafe, or was it that certain neighborhoods weren't Italian, and you weren't sure what you would be getting into in those neighborhoods?

JT: 01:01:16 I think it was a combination of both. I think, no matter where you went in the neighborhood, I think my parents ... Especially my mom, she was the disciplinarian because my father was always working. My father worked two jobs. He was always working. If we went to Mount Carmel church, or if we went somewhere else, so long as we were in the neighborhood, she had no questions on it.

KL: 01:01:16 She knew you were being watched.

JT: 01:01:16 Yeah.

KL: 01:01:39 Yeah, she knew there were other people-

JT: 01:01:42 Safe. I guess, once you started going out of the neighborhood, "Who are you going with, where are you going, what's the place that you're going to, what time are you going to be back? Come back right after the dance." Plus, she still had my brother and my sister to care for. She can give me some time, but she can't devote the whole day to me. A parent has to spread their time out somewhat evenly.

KL: 01:02:05 Yeah. How did you get to the other neighborhoods?

JT: 01:02:08 Always the bus.

KL: 01:02:08 Okay.

JT: 01:02:09 Yeah, always the bus. When we were younger, just get the buses, or the trains. We would go down to Manhattan quite a bit. We loved going to Times Square back in the day.

KL: 01:02:09 Oh, you did?

JT: 01:02:20 Oh yeah. We would just get on the 3rd Avenue L, right on 183rd Street. I think the last stop on that was ... It was only basically a shuttle from there to 149th Street, 149th Street up to Fordham Road. That was the 3rd Avenue ... No, it did not. You're right. It did go past it. It became White Plains Road. Then it did go up to about Gun Hill Road. That was the 3rd Avenue L line. We would get on the 3rd Avenue L, go down to 149th Street, go down a couple of tunnels, and get on, I believe it was the-

KL: 01:02:55 The subway, like the 4, 5 [crosstalk 01:02:56] or whatever it was [crosstalk 01:02:56]

JT: 01:02:56 The 4, 5 yeah. We had that; it'd take you right there. Even if we took the wrong train, there was always the shuttle between Grand Central and Times Square.

KL: 01:03:02 Yeah. You guys, you really did use the public transportation system.

JT: 01:03:07 Yeah. Actually, in Times Square, on the subway platform they had a place called Times Square Records. We got to know the guy that operated the shop there. He would sell these oldie records, all the doo-wop records, right there. If there was a record you wanted, and you couldn't get it anywhere, he had it. He had every record from every area, every kind of record. He was tremendous there.

KL: 01:03:39 Okay. Oh, cool.

JT: 01:03:40 Then of course we would go up into Times Square and at that time Times Square was kind of seedy. They'd have a lot of X-rated shops. Every movie house was an X-rated shop, but still it was the excitement of the lights and everything that's going on

there. In fact, Times Square's really nice, even today. Times Square's wonderful. You go down to Times Square, they got the streets closed off now. You can go sit down, that's something.

- KL: 01:03:40 Yeah, the pedestrians ...
- JT: 01:04:01 It's wonderful. The pedestrian walk. That used to be where we used to have to run across it and not get killed. I mean it's nice. New York's a wonderful place. Even the neighborhood here is still wonderful. I come here once a week, or once every other week. I still get my mozzarella, my ricotta, my sausage, my bread. I get my vegetables. I go into the market. It's basically, me coming here, always running into someone I know. I love going into Teitel Brothers. That's now their fourth or fifth generation family owned. That's a very unique store. That store, I started going there with my grandmother when the original owners had it. I was a little kid. She would talk to them in Italian. These were Jewish guys.
- KL: 01:04:48 Now your grandmother probably spoke Abruzzese or she spoke Italian?
- JT: 01:04:53 She spoke strictly Italian. You have to keep in mind, Abruzzese is just a dialect of the Italian language.
- KL: 01:04:58 Right. Yeah, yeah.
- JT: 01:04:59 She brought me into there, and the owners were Jewish. I never understood, later on, how Jewish people would speak Italian so well. Their sons took over after them, same thing, speak Italian. Their sons took after them. Now I know the third generation. I know, when I go in there I still go see Gil He's about my age. His kids are working there, and yet they speak Italian. I said to him, "Gil," I said, "Why do you guys speak Italian? Where do you get it?" "It's business. You got to speak Italian if you want the business,"
- KL: 01:05:40 Okay. But so, they're Jewish and not Italian.
- JT: 01:05:40 Not Italian.
- KL: 01:05:40 Okay.

JT: 01:05:43 They're not Italian. They're Jewish, not Italian. He said that his grandfather told him when he was little, "You've got to learn Italian if you want to make the money."

KL: 01:05:51 How did they learn Italian, just by working in the store maybe?

JT: 01:05:53 I don't know if they went to school, if they just spoke to people, but smart to learn the language. They're smart to learn the language, and that store is still the same as it was years and years ago.

KL: 01:06:04 Well you mentioned that you would go with your grandmother on the errands, to get the groceries and things like that. You said your mom cooked a lot, but did your grandmother also cook?

JT: 01:06:04 Sure.

KL: 01:06:15 Did you guys do meals on Sundays together?

JT: 01:06:18 Always. We always did the meals together unless something was going on. By the time we were in college, of course there were meetings, and there were study periods that you weren't going to be able to do there, so you were able to get a free pass on that one. You didn't have to come to dinner, but the dish was prepared for you and it was left on the stove. When you came home, you got to eat.

KL: 01:06:40 Okay.

JT: 01:06:40 All right. Basically, that was there. The family life, I mean looking back on it, it as actually really good. At the time we didn't think so. We felt it was kind of strict. We felt it was kind of, not having your own say, and so on and so forth. Looking back on it I think us as children being disciplined, and the whole neighborhood being disciplined the way we were, we all round up growing up to be nice citizens. We all round up nice family people. I mean I tried to instill some of that with my kids when they were younger. My kids are all grown now. They're-

KL: 01:07:19 How many kids do you have?

JT: 01:07:20 I have two boys. One is 38, the other one's 32.

KL: 01:07:23 Okay.

JT: 01:07:23 They're all grown and doing their own thing very nicely. When I finally left the neighborhood, when I retired from teaching in 1992, I wanted to open a little ... I did not want to stop working. I wanted to keep working. Mainly because while I was teaching, I noticed that teachers retired, and I would ask them, "What are you going to go do?" Some of the teachers, "I'm going to do nothing. I'm going to just take it easy." Within two years those people were dead.

KL: 01:07:53 Right.

JT: 01:07:54 When you do nothing, something happens to your body. I don't know what it is, lack of activity, something, but you die. I wasn't going to die. I found an old boarding house that I opened up into a small bed and breakfast.

KL: 01:08:12 Up where you live now?

JT: 01:08:12 Yeah. I still-

KL: 01:08:13 Oh. Where do you live now?

JT: 01:08:14 Right now I am in Cochection, New York. It's near Monticello, up in the Catskills. Right now, I still have it. We have the 14 room units outside, 6 rooms in the main house, we have a total of 20 rooms.

KL: 01:08:29 Oh, nice.

JT: 01:08:29 Yeah. I operate the motor lodge all year long. We're near a concert venue known as Bethel Woods. Bethel Woods is on the same grounds as the original Woodstock festival.

KL: 01:08:40 Oh, really?

JT: 01:08:40 Yeah. There are a lot of concerts that go on up there. I'm no longer really booking any concert venues, but every once in a while, I do a little band here or there, in one of the nightclubs. I'm out every week. I'm still clubbing. I go to clubs all the time.

KL: 01:08:55 Okay. In New York, or just kind of all around?

JT: 01:08:58 Upstate New York mostly.

KL: 01:08:59 Okay. Upstate, okay.

JT: 01:08:59 Whichever clubs I can find in the Middletown area. I go to the casinos. I do a lot of traveling now. I'm in Florida quite a bit. I'm in Atlantic City quite a bit.

KL: 01:09:09 Okay. Did you go to Woodstock? Were you at Woodstock?

JT: 01:09:11 I wasn't at Woodstock. I was working in one of the clubs. That weekend we brought a group in from Canada known as the Guess Who. They had a record called American Woman [inaudible 01:09:23], they had a couple of things out. I was at that concert. It was on a Friday night. We did attempt to go up to Woodstock. We got as far as the Major Deegan here on Fordham Road, which was closed, so I had to turn around and come back.

KL: 01:09:37 You didn't get to go.

JT: 01:09:38 My venture to Woodstock was only Fordham Road and the Major Deegan. I never made it further than that.

KL: 01:09:44 Now you go to Bethel Wood.

JT: 01:09:44 Now I go to Bethel Woods, yeah.

KL: 01:09:49 Okay. Can you talk a little bit about what kind of food did your grandmother or your mother make? What do you remember? Did you have a set family menu, like Monday was soup, Tuesday was ...

JT: 01:09:58 Okay. Yeah. You have to keep in mind that as we're growing up, my dad is working in the post office, trying to save money to buy a house. That was his goal. He was working two jobs. Shopping, which was an art of its own, always had to watch your pennies. Always had to watch your pennies. My mom and my grandmother would try to make foods that were not expensive, yet healthy for us.

They of course, on Sunday, you make your own tomato sauce. Then you eat pasta on Sunday. You also eat pasta, the leftovers on Tuesday. Then maybe you have a different kind of pasta on Thursday. By doing pasta three nights a week you could feed your entire family for just a couple of dollars.

It even holds nowadays, when you want to do that you could feed your family very economically, for just a couple of bucks, if

you incorporate it into your total scheme of food, the right way. We would also have chicken. Saturday would be our treat. Saturday would be almost the steak night. My dad, no matter what, felt that it was good for us to have protein, or meat.

KL: 01:11:16 Excuse me...

JT: 01:11:15 Go ahead.

KL: 01:11:16 It's probably our lunch. Hi. Thank you. Take care.

JT: 01:11:21 You have enough protein ...

KL: 01:11:22 I'll set that there.

JT: 01:11:22 Is this still going?

KL: 01:11:27 Yeah.

JT: 01:11:31 Okay. The protein or meat on Saturday night. My mom would be encouraged to try to have some sort of meat, either something along the lines of a steak once in a while, or maybe lamb if we can get lamb, chicken of course at least once a week, maybe twice. You have to keep in mind when you say chicken-

KL: 01:11:54 What was your favorite thing?

JT: 01:11:55 Well, just a little side note on that, when you say chicken, we used to go to the chicken market and actually pick out the chicken.

KL: 01:12:02 Right. Did they go in the back?

JT: 01:12:05 Well, not in the back, in the front. They would slit the neck in front of you because they to drain the blood, and then they put it into a feather machine. I'm watching this as a kid. I'm saying, "Oh my god, what are they doing?" At an early age grandma would explain to me, or my mom would explain to me that that's the chicken. Then go in the back and they would of course further smooth it out. That was really good chicken. I'm talking about fresh stuff. That was really good.

KL: 01:12:05 I'll bet.

JT: 01:12:29 That was all good. We even ate things like liver, for some reason, on a Saturday, or once during the week. I guess at that time they thought liver, which of course is an organ food, we all know now they're not really that good for you, they all thought it was healthy for you because it was-

KL: 01:12:46 Because it had high iron?

JT: 01:12:47 High iron, exactly. Exactly. I guess whatever meal we ate, and there was always a vegetable at every meal. Even though we didn't like it. It could have been spinach; it could have been broccoli. It could have been peas. [inaudible 01:13:00] beans. It could have been a dandelion or any of those kinds of things. The dandelion we would pick right around here.

KL: 01:13:08 I was going to ask, did you do ... Maybe eventually when you moved to Cambreleng, some people had gardens in their backyard, and they'd grow the tomatoes and stuff like that.

JT: 01:13:20 Yeah. My uncle had a garden. The garden was on 188th Street and Belmont Avenue, right down the block from the church. Right now, there's a building there. He had a great lot there, fenced it off with some tin. He was able to grow a lot of products. I would often go there because he allowed me to keep my pigeons there.

KL: 01:13:41 Oh, you had pigeons?

JT: 01:13:42 Oh, we had pigeons. Yeah, we had pigeons on the rooftops. When the landlord would find out we would have to leave.

KL: 01:13:46 What'd you do with the pigeons?

JT: 01:13:48 Fly them. You just fly the pigeons. Pigeons, there's two different kind of pigeons. There's something known as homers, and something known as tiblets. Tiblets are the birds that don't fly far from where their coop is. You would let them go, they would fly around, and come back down, and put them away at night. Homers would like to take journeys for miles. You would get your pigeons and go to Orchard Beach and release them and see how long it took them to make it home, if they made it home.

KL: 01:14:18 They knew how to get home?

JT: 01:14:18 Yeah, yeah.

KL: 01:14:18 Okay.

JT: 01:14:20 Yeah. Don't ask me how. Some people ask me how, I don't know how they know. All I know is that when we went to Orchard Beach a couple of times, we let the birds go, and the birds would go up in the air. They would fly around, fly around, make a bigger circle, and then all of a sudden go like this, and they would wind up in your pigeon coop. I think they would get their bearings. I don't know. I think.

KL: 01:14:43 Yeah, maybe.

JT: 01:14:44 You know like where their home is, they fly and they know the sky. Now there's no signs or anything in the sky, but they know. They know north, west, south. They know directions from where they are, in case they get lost, they want to come home. When we would go to Orchard Beach I would always look at them, say one, two circles, and then they would just go, right home.

KL: 01:15:03 You would go to Orchard Beach in the summer?

JT: 01:15:07 All year.

KL: 01:15:07 That's what you did? Okay.

JT: 01:15:08 A lot of Orchard Beach during the summer.

KL: 01:15:09 Okay.

JT: 01:15:10 That was our [crosstalk 01:15:11]

KL: 01:15:10 Did you guys have your plot, the ...

JT: 01:15:12 Oh, section 13 all the time.

KL: 01:15:15 Section 13. Was that, section 13 was specific to Belmont, is that right?

JT: 01:15:17 Section 13 was all the way on the right-hand side. It was pretty specific that when you go there you knew somebody from the neighborhood would be there. We would all go to section 13. It was all the way at the end of the beach, so you could horse

around a little bit more. You have to keep in mind, you weren't allowed to jump over from the boardwalk to the sand. You had to walk around. Sometimes it was too far, and if you jumped over you would get a ticket. Considering it was all the way down at the end, the police would only go up to section 9 or 10, and then turn around. They would never bother with ...

- KL: 01:15:48 What were the other sections like? Do you know?
- JT: 01:15:51 Well it started with section 1, and went all the way around in a horseshoe.
- KL: 01:15:54 Were they particular to other zones of the Bronx, or of New York City?
- JT: 01:15:58 No, but I-
- KL: 01:15:59 Who congregated in those other sections?
- JT: 01:16:00 Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, the lower sections were right near the parking lot. We noticed that people who wanted picnics would often use those sections because they didn't have to carry the stuff so far. The picnic sections were around sections 1, 2, 3, and 4. The people like us who really didn't carry too much ... Keep in mind it was a journey.
- KL: 01:16:22 Except for pigeons.
- JT: 01:16:22 Yeah. You go to the end of the beach. The pigeons we would let go in the parking lot. We never really went on the beach with them because the parking lot was a lot more open. It was easy for them to find their way. My uncle had a great garden on Belmont. I would often go there and do it with him.
- KL: 01:16:39 You had your pet pigeons here.
- JT: 01:16:40 Yeah, I had my pigeons there. I would fly them from there. Then later on, when I moved upstate, I always had a garden. Always a plot of land, even until today. Right now it's mostly an herb garden because where I am right now, upstate New York, there are so many farms around me it doesn't pay for me to put the time and effort-
- KL: 01:16:40 It's a lot of work. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

JT: 01:17:01 ... into growing corn, when I could just go to the guy and \$3 you get a dozen corn fresh from the ... Right now I've been shopping at so called farmer's markets before farmer's markets were the new vogue. These were basically farmers selling their surplus items.

KL: 01:17:20 From the stands, yeah.

JT: 01:17:22 Yeah. The stands. In fact, one guy I go to now, what he does is that he's never there. He just puts his produce in boxes in a little shed. You go there, you take what you want, you put the money in the can.

KL: 01:17:33 Oh.

JT: 01:17:33 Yeah, it's a trust system. I guess the way he's looking at it... I mean people say, "Oh well if somebody take it ..." Nobody ever takes the money because what are you going to steal, \$8? You're getting food so you give the guys \$3 or \$4, give him \$5.

KL: 01:17:51 That's different than what would happen here.

JT: 01:17:53 Yeah. There's a lot of things, I mean you can't put anything out. Even where I am now, upstate, I leave my keys in the car 24/7.

KL: 01:17:53 You do?

JT: 01:18:01 Yeah. It's right outside in the lot. You leave it there. There are times where you don't lock your door at night, big deal.

KL: 01:18:07 Okay. That's really different than where lived-

JT: 01:18:10 Well, actually as a kid growing up in the elevator buildings, we never locked our door. The door was always open. Keep in mind, there was no air conditioning. It was hot during the summer. You would keep the windows open on the fire escape and get a cross breeze from the hallway. We would never really lock our doors. It wasn't until later on when I was a teenager that you heard about an incident, and this and that, and then people started locking their doors. Somebody's radio got stolen. That's also when narcotics started coming into the neighborhood.

KL: 01:18:41 In the early '60s?

JT: 01:18:42 Yeah. When narcotics started coming in, then some of your friends became junkies.

KL: 01:18:46 I was going to ask about that. You probably saw your friends be affected by things like the narcotics-

JT: 01:18:50 Some of them actually, yeah.

KL: 01:18:52 ... and even the self policing of the neighborhood. Did you have friends get involved in some of that stuff?

JT: 01:18:57 Well yeah. What it is is that the first narcotic that actually I remember coming into the neighborhood was heroine. It looks like it made a full circle, right now it's back into all the neighborhoods. Heroine came about, and that was the first drug. After that, I remember I was introduced to weed right around in the late '60s, into pot. The pot nowadays is 10 times better than the pot back in the day. Back in the day it was horrible. It was really dirty weed. It was hard to get high on it.

Then after that, I noticed while I was teaching school, crack came out. That was a bad, bad drug, when crack came out. A lot of broken families, a lot of parents not caring about their kids. Then I was in school, I was still teaching when we started getting crack babies coming into the school system. Then I also noticed that ... Keep in mind, when I stated teaching school, we had basically one classroom.

When I left teaching we had special ed classes, we had classes that were separated because they now had to get medicated, kids were actually getting drugs during the day by their doctors, sanctioned through the Board of Ed, so they wouldn't harm other kids. The schools became sort of fragmented. That's why you saw a lot of the growth of charter schools, where kids who want to go to learn, go to a charter school. You don't really have a lot of the other elements mixed in.

KL: 01:20:36 How did the neighborhood handle people who were from it who had become a junkie? Who were allegedly making it a less safe environment?

JT: 01:20:45 Yeah. What they would do, the racket guys, the guys I originally started talking about, would lay the law down. If you're a junkie, or if you have a habit, go do what you got to do out of the

neighborhood. You can't do it here. They would just lay the law down for them

KL: 01:21:03 Okay. Don't bring it into the neighborhood.

JT: 01:21:05 Don't bring it. If you have to go rob somebody, go rob somebody past Tremont Avenue, or go Pelham Parkway and rob somebody, but don't rob anybody from the neighborhood. Then if they were caught, or if they did it, they were dealt with. The hell was really beaten out of them.

KL: 01:21:17 Okay. I have a couple more questions, then we can eat lunch.

JT: 01:21:25 Sure.

KL: 01:21:26 I'm curious to know if your family, you mentioned that your father came over in the '30s, do you know how old he was? If he came by himself he must have 18 to 20?

JT: 01:21:26 18.

KL: 01:21:36 A young man. Okay.

JT: 01:21:36 Yeah, he was a young man.

KL: 01:21:39 You father was born in 1920, about?

JT: 01:21:40 Yeah. I think he was born, yeah, right around there.

KL: 01:21:44 Okay. Did he ever talk about Italy, what it was like in Abruzzi?

JT: 01:21:47 Yeah. He actually said how hard it was for them, always working. He was probably a kid working the farms.

KL: 01:21:54 I was going to say, were they farmers? Did they work the land?

JT: 01:21:57 Yeah. Of course, what you probably hear from everybody, he would have to walk a mile to school.

KL: 01:22:03 Yeah, uh-huh (affirmative).

JT: 01:22:04 You'd have to walk a mile to go to school.

KL: 01:22:06 There's a reason for that cliché.

JT: 01:22:10 Yeah. He always mentioned, I mean the one thing he really forced on us was the education. He felt that we were in a poor, Italian neighborhood, and the only way out of it is with an education. That was the one thing he constantly drove into us.

KL: 01:22:27 Mm-hmm (affirmative). I know you said that sometimes it was hard to talk about that stuff, especially with that generation, it could have been hard to talk, especially for the respect for the elders, but did he ever talk about what he remembered about living in fascism as a farmer, or as someone with [crosstalk 01:22:44]

JT: 01:22:44 I think he basically led that he had to get out of here because the conditions over there were terrible.

KL: 01:22:49 Okay.

JT: 01:22:51 A lot of hard work, and it was just terrible over there all the time, but he did go back there when he retired.

KL: 01:22:59 He did?

JT: 01:23:00 Oh, yeah. He went back a few times. I still have a cousin that lives there.

KL: 01:23:05 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Have you ever been back?

JT: 01:23:06 I haven't been back, but that's on my bucket list. I will be going back.

KL: 01:23:09 Okay. To Abruzzi?

JT: 01:23:10 Yeah, soon. I'm going to be going back there.

KL: 01:23:12 Oh, you are?

JT: 01:23:13 Yeah. I have businesses that I'm in the process of selling, liquidating right now. If someone buys the motor lodge from me, that will give me enough funds to make everybody happy, and for me to do my charities. I have a very good partner with me right now, she's 26 years old. She graduated Binghamton. We've been together now for the past five or six years. She has an online business going for her, very well. I help her with all the marketing and distribution.

KL: 01:23:48 Oh, cool.

JT: 01:23:48 That's why I go to so many places right now. We do a lot of traveling to different areas. I do a lot of the photography for her.

KL: 01:23:55 Oh, you do?

JT: 01:23:57 Yeah.

KL: 01:23:58 Oh, neat.

JT: 01:23:58 Yeah, a lot of photography for her. She helps me with a lot of the, oh the, she has her own channel on LiveMe.

KL: 01:23:58 Oh, really?

JT: 01:24:02 Yeah. Do you know what that one is?

KL: 01:24:05 I don't.

JT: 01:24:05 Yeah.

KL: 01:24:06 Do you know LiveMe?

JT: 01:24:11 LiveMe is a live video show, broadcast, of what you're doing at a particular time. You broadcast to all your followers. Your followers reward you with diamonds and hearts, which translated into money.

KL: 01:24:26 Okay.

JT: 01:24:27 They purchase those and they give them to you.

KL: 01:24:27 Oh.

JT: 01:24:30 You do different themes on your LiveMe broadcast. The audience of course is very, very young. I don't think there's anyone ... Well, now there are. I would say the majority of the audience on LiveMe is probably in their teens, or maybe early 20s. That's the project that we've been expanding. That's been doing really, really well for her.

KL: 01:24:51 Oh, cool. Wow, interesting.

JT: 01:24:52 Yeah. That keep me busy. I just got back from North Carolina on Monday. We did something there. We did something in Tennessee.

KL: 01:24:59 Oh, cool.

JT: 01:25:00 We did something in Nebo, North Carolina. Then we were in Daytona, Lauderdale, Sarasota.

KL: 01:25:09 Wow.

JT: 01:25:09 Yeah, we travel a lot.

KL: 01:25:12 Then, your father, he just talked about the hardship. Did he talk at all, or did your mom, your mom was a different ... She had people come before her, but did they ever talk to you about ... When is it that you realized you were Italian, or Italian American?

JT: 01:25:26 You have to keep in mind as a kid, even going to Mount Carmel, everything was Italian.

KL: 01:25:31 It just was there.

JT: 01:25:33 It was there. I didn't realize that-

KL: 01:25:35 Everything else wasn't Italian?

JT: 01:25:37 ... everybody wasn't Italian until I got to high school. When I was rubbing shoulders with a lot of Irish people. The Irish people were talking negative things about the Italian. I couldn't believe it. I said, "Well what's the matter with you?" "Oh you Italians, you do this, you have meatballs, you have this and that." I said, "Yeah, what about it?" I got to rub shoulders with a lot of people who were not Italian. That's the first time that it really dawned on me, in high school, that not everyone is Italian. Not everyone lives in Belmont.

KL: 01:26:10 Okay. Your parents, they never really made any distinction between what it meant to be American versus what it meant to be Italian, or vice versa?

JT: 01:26:18 My dad was very, very proud of being an American. Very proud. Did not like anyone talking bad about the country. Did not like anyone speaking out against the country. The United States

first, all the time. Of course his own culture was Italy, so that became sort of secondary to him. He wanted us to be proud Americans, but he did want us to know that we had an Italian culture.

He did want me to try to talk to my grandmother. My grandmother never spoke English, only Italian. My father went to Theodore Roosevelt to learn English. He went there at night, after work. He learned English. He always stressed the importance of being multilingual. We didn't understand that at the time. He said, "For every language you speak, you're a person." I never knew what that meant until later on.

KL: 01:27:17 Later on, yeah. He really knew. I wanted to ask, when your parents bought the home on Cambreleng, did he buy it with the GI bill? Was he able to buy it from that benefit?

JT: 01:27:27 No. He was able to buy it because he worked two jobs.

KL: 01:27:30 Okay.

JT: 01:27:31 He constantly worked. He would work at the post office. He had the 4:00 AM, to I believe the 11:00 AM shift. Then at 12:00 noon he would work another job until 8:00 at night. We didn't see him sometimes until 9:00 at night.

KL: 01:27:43 Okay. He didn't ever benefit from the GI bill for school or anything like that?

JT: 01:27:45 No. Maybe for language he did.

KL: 01:27:48 For English classes. Okay.

JT: 01:27:49 Yeah, but I don't think for anything else.

KL: 01:27:52 Okay. Then my last question is, when you mentioned that you were married for a period of time, did you marry an Italian?

JT: 01:27:59 Yes. I married an Italian.

KL: 01:28:01 From your neighborhood?

JT: 01:28:02 From the neighborhood, yes, of course.

KL: 01:28:04 Was that important to your family?

JT: 01:28:04 Yeah, well I guess-

KL: 01:28:06 You don't have to talk to me too much about that, but I want to know, would you have ever considered not marrying an Italian, like marrying someone who was a non-Italian?

JT: 01:28:14 Well you have to keep in mind, I had thousands of relationships with women. I was in an industry, the music industry, where women were at my disposal daily. I had relationships with many, many women. However, when it came to the home, I always thought it was a given that I would never marry anyone like that, only marry someone from the neighborhood, or Italian, and basically that's what happened. Everyone else was just there. When it came to raising a family, make sure you raise a family with a good Italian girl.

KL: 01:28:52 This was the message you'd received so to speak.

JT: 01:28:53 The message, they never told me that.

KL: 01:28:54 That they never really told to you though.

JT: 01:28:56 I think it was implied, yeah.

KL: 01:28:56 Okay.

JT: 01:28:57 I think it was implied.

KL: 01:29:00 You never tried to break the form, break the mold so to speak, in that regard?

JT: 01:29:06 In that regard, not really, until today.

KL: 01:29:08 Okay.

JT: 01:29:10 Now I break all the norms.

KL: 01:29:12 Okay. Right, well your parents have passed, right?

JT: 01:29:14 Yes.

KL: 01:29:15 Sometimes children are liberated even much later in life, but they're liberated once their parents go.

JT: 01:29:21 Yeah. Oh it's wonderful. Even nowadays, just meeting people from all walks of life, it's wonderful. The trick to enjoying life is keeping your body healthy. Live a healthy lifestyle. Try everything, so long as it's not dangerous, it's going to harm you, and just enjoy life every day. Be thankful that you wake up, and enjoy anything that comes your way. Like now you have lunch, I'm going to enjoy my lunch.

KL: 01:29:49 Yeah. Sounds good. All right. Good stuff. Anything else you want to share? Sounds like you have-

JT: 01:29:53 No. Basically just growing up here in the Belmont community was really a blessing in disguise. I found it strange later on, during the time when they were burning a lot of the buildings down in the Bronx, and the Bronx was always on the news during the '70s. When I told people I came from-

KL: 01:30:16 As kind of a bad place.

JT: 01:30:17 Yeah.

KL: 01:30:17 Giving you a bad name.

JT: 01:30:18 They said, "Oh my god, how did you ever grow up there? How did you survive?" When little do they know, this is still safe over here in Belmont nowadays. This is still a safe neighborhood. One of the best thing that happened to this Belmont community, the Belmont community was starting to deteriorate, but it was probably only about 20 years ago that Fordham allowed their students to shop and go into the neighborhood.

KL: 01:30:44 They finally allowed them into the neighborhood.

JT: 01:30:46 Yeah. They would always confine the students to here. Maybe go up to Fordham Road, but they didn't want you to venture out into the neighborhood, for your safety. Now, you go to Arthur Avenue right now, you go in Tino's, you go to one of the coffee shops, and you'll see the Fordham students are there.

KL: 01:31:03 Yeah, there's a big ... Yeah.

JT: 01:31:04 They're there with their laptops, and their iPad, and they're doing what they have to.

KL: 01:31:09 It helped bring the neighborhood back economically [crosstalk 01:31:09]

JT: 01:31:08 Yeah. Plus the students are getting good food. They're getting good stuff in the neighborhood there. It was a good thing for both the college and the neighborhood.

KL: 01:31:17 Yeah. That's good to hear.

JT: 01:31:18 I like seeing that they're working together. There's a couple of good feasts that they have in the neighborhood. Ferragosto is a real big one. Ferragosto, the buses are allowed to park here in the parking lot, and then the people just walk over to the neighborhood.

KL: 01:31:34 They're a couple of collaborations [crosstalk 01:31:35]

JT: 01:31:35 Yeah, that's nice. I like seeing things like that, where people work with one another. It's just wonderful. It's been a couple of times when I'm in the neighborhood, and I can always spot strangers because they're walking around with a little piece of paper, wanting to know where to go to eat.

KL: 01:31:51 Yeah, or their phone, with a map on their phone.

JT: 01:31:54 Yeah, something. I say, "What you want? You want cheese, go to that store over there. You want something to eat, go to there." Someday I might come back and be a guide for the neighborhood.

KL: 01:32:04 Oh, yeah.

JT: 01:32:05 I have some shots here.

KL: 01:32:07 Oh yeah, let's look at them.

JT: 01:32:08 Yeah. This one here, this is the earliest one I could find.

KL: 01:32:12 Oh, wow.

JT: 01:32:16 This is when I went to PS74. This is now Grace Dodge. I was there in the kindergarten, and I believe first and second grade.

KL: 01:32:24 Okay. Which one are you?

JT: 01:32:25 I'm right over here at the end. Then this is when I was in the third grade.

KL: 01:32:31 Will you take a picture? Do you mind if we take pictures of these?

JT: 01:32:32 Sure, go ahead.

KL: 01:32:32 Okay, great.

JT: 01:32:33 Wait, I think there's two of them there. One is from me. Yep. This one here is when I was in the first grade.

KL: 01:32:33 Oh, yeah.

JT: 01:32:39 I'm still in the same spot, all the way on the left side.

KL: 01:32:45 [inaudible 01:32:45]

JT: 01:32:45 Yeah. If you can, this one is when I was in my third grade, still in Grace Dodge or PS74. That was, I believe, the last year we had an elementary school here. They changed the following year. That was, I believe, 1954, '55. When I was in the third grade, Dion was in the sixth grade here.

KL: 01:33:15 Oh.

JT: 01:33:18 He was in the same school. He was in the sixth grade at the same time. He's three years older than me.

KL: 01:33:25 In 1953 ... Do you remember when the buses got rerouted to go to [crosstalk 01:33:31]

JT: 01:33:31 The buses didn't get rerouted until the 1960s.

KL: 01:33:34 The early '60s.

JT: 01:33:35 Yeah. During the '60s the buses got rerouted because of the racial tensions that were happening.

KL: 01:33:42 In the South Bronx.

JT: 01:33:43 Yeah. The bus would actually go through the Belmont section, make a turn on Crotona Avenue, and then go down into the so called South Bronx. What happened is that, you had a lot of the

people from certain neighborhoods here in Belmont who resented the encroachment of black and Hispanic people into the neighborhood.

What they did is that a lot of times the buses who would be going through the neighborhood of the people that were living down on 180th Street or 167th Street, there would be people in the bus and they would often have bottles thrown at the buses, and remarks were made, so buses were often kicked at the bus stops. The bus company rerouted it, took it out of the 187th Street-

- KL: 01:34:32 Out of Belmont.
- JT: 01:34:33 Out of Belmont. They moved some of them to Fordham Road, and they moved the other ones down to Tremont or 180th Street. That's how they-
- KL: 01:34:39 Okay. The people throwing the bottles kind of got their way, huh?
- JT: 01:34:41 I guess they go their way.
- KL: 01:34:42 Yeah.
- JT: 01:34:44 That's not something that we as members of the Belmont community are proud of. It wasn't a good cross section of how the people felt at the time. It was only people who, I guess felt that by doing the violence, throwing the bottles and that, they would get their way, that they would keep the neighborhood the same, but time changes everything. When I went to Mount Carmel ... Let me see if I have this. No, this one here. This one here is when I was in the Mount Carmel, my first year.
- KL: 01:35:19 Oh, look at that.
- JT: 01:35:20 That's my fifth grade picture.
- KL: 01:35:22 That's a great picture. This is your school picture from Mount Carmel. In fifth grade.
- JT: 01:35:22 Mount Carmel, the fifth grade, right.
- KL: 01:35:29 In fifth grade it would have been 1954, '55, about? Right, because '44 you would have been about 10?

JT: 01:35:38 Let me see. That was, okay, '70, '65, yeah. Right about 1955. Yeah, right around there. We had a basketball team also, on the Mount Carmel team. I found this picture.

KL: 01:35:48 Oh, very cool.

JT: 01:35:48 That's myself as members of the team. I tried to stay in touch ... This is my friend Bobby Domatis. That's Neil DeLucal've seen both of those guys in the past couple of years. Richie Cardili's in California. I see those guys once in a while.

KL: 01:36:06 This is 1958. That's cool.

JT: 01:36:09 Right. Our parents, especially my dad, did not want us to stay in the neighborhood during the summer. He wanted us to go out, to go to green pastures. He wanted us to go out and get fresh air. He felt that fresh air would be good for us after being stuffed up. This is going back, this has to be when I was, I think about 11 or 12 years old. The CYO, which is the Catholic Youth Organization from Mount Carmel, had what they called a two-week camp. They would take the kids from all the different neighborhoods and ship them out to camp.

KL: 01:36:45 In the country, so to speak.

JT: 01:36:45 In the country.

KL: 01:36:45 Right.

JT: 01:36:46 The country was up in the Putnam Valley. You had to get a physical to go there. You couldn't have whooping cough; you couldn't be sick. When I went there, the photographer told me to stay over there, they want to take a picture of you. My friend Tubby is over here, he's on line, we were going together. I wound up-

KL: 01:37:03 Which newspaper was this in?

JT: 01:37:04 This was in the Daily News.

KL: 01:37:05 Oh, that's so funny. What a great picture.

JT: 01:37:08 Yeah. That was in the Daily News.

KL: 01:37:11 Was it all boys who went up-

JT: 01:37:12 Yeah, all boys. Yes, of course. The Catholics are not going to mix girls and boys, and trouble there. 1958, when I graduated Our Lady of Mount Carmel school, the bishop was Bishop Perdiconi. Let me see. I'm in here. I guess it's somewhat alphabetical. I was trying to find myself this morning on the way, but I couldn't look. I just have to see. These are the S's. It's probably in here. S, T, it has to be ...

KL: 01:37:42 Tinari. Here you are.

JT: 01:37:47 Yeah, there we go. Yeah. Right over there. This is the way the school is now. Right now, I don't really think the school is the same. Of course, it's all mixed. I noticed part of the school is not a school anymore.

KL: 01:38:06 [crosstalk 01:38:06]

JT: 01:38:05 At this time, this was the graduating class.

KL: 01:38:09 Realto Studios. He does a lot of photos [crosstalk 01:38:10]

JT: 01:38:09 Yeah, Realto Studios. He had his place on 187th Street.

KL: 01:38:13 You can take that picture.

JT: 01:38:15 In fact right where the ... There's a florist there now. That's where Realto had his place. Basically, it was actually nice growing up here in the Belmont community. I have no regrets or anything like that. I still keep in touch with a lot of the guys. Of course, so many people are all over the country now. Of course, thanks to Facebook, we are able to-

KL: 01:38:44 Right. Thank you for sharing that.

JT: 01:38:45 ... keep in touch. Yeah.

KL: 01:38:46 Yeah, that's great.

JT: 01:38:48 This was nice.

KL: 01:38:49 Great. Okay. Should we-

Speaker 3: 01:38:51 Good.

KL: 01:38:51 ... cut it and eat? Anything else you want to say on the recording?

JT: 01:38:54 [inaudible 01:38:54]

KL: 01:38:53 You can keep talking while we eat, of course.

JT: 01:38:56 Yeah.

KL: 01:38:57 I'm hungry too.

JT: 01:38:58 Basically you guys got a nutshell of how it was to live here. I wish a lot of the kids could experience what I experienced growing up.

KL: 01:39:07 Yeah. Do you ever talk to your kids about it? They ever ask you-

JT: 01:39:09 Oh yeah, sure. Oh yeah. I would take my kids, especially when they were young, to the neighborhood. I would say, "Come over here. This is [inaudible 01:39:17] that's the building I was in. Come on, let's go in." We go in the building, see who's there. We would go around the corner. I still go to some of the shops. It's good that I did them when they were younger, when they were really young, because a lot of the shops are no longer there.

KL: 01:39:29 Yeah, a lot of stuff has changed.

JT: 01:39:31 A lot of these shops where the owner passes away or something, sometimes the young kids don't want to go into the business.

KL: 01:39:37 Yeah, mm-hmm (affirmative). It's true. All right. Let's ...

Speaker 3: 01:39:41 Thanks.

KL: 01:39:41 Thank you for ...