

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

Mark Naison: We are here at Fordham University interviewing Harrison Cruse and this is Dr. Mark Naison and helping with the interview's our community researcher Robert Guns. Mr. Cruse could you spell your name and give us your date of birth?

Harrison Cruse: H-A-R-R-I-S-O-N C-R-U-S-E August 10, 1935

MN: WE always begin by asking our informants to tell us about their families, and in this case how they came to New York and how they came to the Bronx.

HC: Sure, on my mother's side, Trista, my mother and her four siblings came to New York by 1926-27 in there somewhere I forget the exact time. And they were Prussian.

MN: Now where were they from originally?

HC: North of Virginia and Moryawk, North Carolina and Elizabeth City and what was the other one? Roanoke, Virginia. Places where they lived.

MN: So your mother's side is from the Carolinas—

HC: --Ashby's from Virginia by way of getting us out into Barbados into Carolinas that's how it worked.

MN: So you've done some—

HC: --into New York.

MN: --oh so you've done some genealogy. Tell us a little bit about the genealogy and how you found out that the family originally came from Guinea Bissau.

HC: Well I have a cousin at the research studio and such program, a research program and he found a family tree extention in Guineae Bissau. So on the Ashby side of the family for instance there was an Ashby shipping line, which was a British shipping line, famous shipping line, and one of the relatives was a sailor and knew the navigation pretty well and worked for the Ashby shipping line and that way they came to Barbados. He became a bajan citizen and then came on to North Carolina that procreated—

MN: --what year did he move—

HC: --I don't remember

MN:-- in the nineteenth century or twentieth century?

HC: Nineteenth century.

MN: Nineteenth century.

HC: Yes.

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

MN: Cause we don't hear much about that, about immigration from Barbados to Virginia in the nineteenth century so wow. One side of your family is from Virginia with a connection to Barbados and the other side—

HC: From South of Barbados into the United States that's the track on my mother's side.

MN: Your father's side.

HC: My father's side is Native American and a combination Native American, African American, predominantly Native American from Roanoke, Virginia. We don't know much about his family. His mother passed and she was buried in an Indian reservation she refused to live among the—hid in the environment with the slaves, beings and carried on, and seems like one of her brothers killed a white man, John doing something and they hid in the Indian reservation.

MN: So this was in Virginia?

HC: This was in Roanoke Virginia

MN: Roanoke has an Indian Reservation?

HC: Right outside of Roanoke.

MN: Is it still there?

HC: Yes parts of it are still there. The cemetery isn't there, we couldn't find any stones or anything but parts of the reservation are still there. We're working on research over there.

MN: Did your father and mother meet in Virginia or New York?

HC: They met in Virginia.

MN: Met in Virginia.

HC: Yes.

MN: They met in what city?

HC: In Norfolk.

MN: In Norfolk.

HC: Yes.

MN: What sort of work did your father do?

HC: My father was a sort of vocal kind of guy. He learned to, he was very good in math, and he's pretty well educated. What he did was, he joined the army and made out pretty well for an African American slash whatever doing the end of the first world war, at the very end he got in. As a matter of fact he was harassed because he wasn't allowed to use a typewriter so got into headquarters company and they

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

said what's this nigger doing here. But he was the only one there, so he became a pretty popular guy and got an honorable discharge from the army and came home where he joined North of Western Railroad and he was working for the railroad for many many years.

MN: So how did your father—when did your parents move to New York or did they move to Harlem first?

HC: Yes they moved to Harlem from Virginia and siblings. My mother had twin sisters, a young baby brother, his name was Kermin Ashby and it was Pearl, Loyce, and Vivins Ashby.

MN: Did your father move up working still working in the railroad?

HC: Yes, exactly. Wasn't home very much because of it.

MN: Were you born in Harlem or born in the Bronx?

HC: Harlem

MN: Do you remember what neighborhood you were born in?

HC: Yes, Morningside Heights Area 118th st. between Morningside and St. Nicholas.

MN: How old were you when your family moved to the Bronx?

HC: Second grade I think we started, began school in Harlem then left. I think second grade, went to PS 23 in the Bronx.

MN: And did you move right to Lyman place?

HC: No I wished we did.

MN: Where did you move to in the Bronx first?

HC: You really want to know.[Laughs]

MN: Yes.

HC: We moved all over the place, we were always moving. We started at Teller Av. in the Bronx.

MN: So Teller Av. is just up the hill. So was that a predominantly white neighborhood when you moved there?

HC: Ooh Irish and Italian, very nice.

MN: So you moved there was your family the only family of color in the block?

HC: We moved if we wanted to.

MN: So this was 1931-32

HC: Sure

MN: PS 23 was where?

HC: When we moved there we registered in the school and moved right out. We didn't stay long enough to get into the school. We moved to Trinity Av. And then we went to 23.

MN: Trinity Av. and where?

HC; Right across the street from Morris Av.

MN: Were these all in walk up buildings or were they private houses?

HC: --six story walk ups with the fire escapes.

MN: And then you went to PS 23 was that what they called 23 Park?

HC: Yes. Great school, I still remember my teachers and everything. Beautiful people, Ms. Telly the Irish broke, she was just, she actually gave my brother and I a party when we left and she cried like a baby.

MN: Was education stressed in your home?

HC; Oh yes. Yes my grandfather, going back to Virginia now, my mother's father was a Garveyist.

MN: Ah yes, so you had the Garvey Movement.

HC: Yes so he organized the Garveying Movement in Norfolk—

MN: What was his name?

HC: --he was a printman. Samuel Ashby.

MN: Samuel Ashby and have you done historical research on him?

HC: Yes.

MN: He's a major historical figure and he was the head of the Garvey Movement in Norfolk.

HC: Yes that's right.

MN: So did you grow with the Garvey Newspaper in your house?

HC: For sure, oh yes. And African history and great pride.

MN: So was this something spoken at the dinner table or you know

HC: Yes, education

[crosstalk]

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

MN: So education was stressed, pride in your African ancestry was stressed. And when you went to school, school was something that came easy to you

HC: Yes and no. I'll tell you why the no. The yes part was strong at home, but we had moved around so much and when we started in a school like going from Teller Av. to 23, to Trinity we had to start all over again. We missed our work and had to catch up with it, and we found that to be troublesome and Trinity at that time was of Italian mixture and some African Americans coming in and there were fights all the time.

MN: So Trinity Av. and 166thst?

HC: Yes exactly.

MN: Was it a tough area in the 40s?

HC: It was very, we had to get used to us moving and there was some resistance. And yes the education was stressed in the house and my uncle Kermit was the first physician doctor in the family. Like I said it was stressed so much.

MN: He was on your mother's side?

HC: Yes on my mother's side. So what happened, to go back a little bit to move forward, before my mother came to, her mother passed. She graduated from a union college, I forgot what it was called, North of Union or something like that it will come to me in a minute.

MN: Virginia Union.

HC: Virginia Union that's right. Yes she was the first college graduate in the family and she went on to emphasize education with you know her husband being in Garveyism and that was a nice combination. She passes at the early age of 31 leaving my grandfather with five children really heavy stuff. So he had a shoestore in Norfolk. A Sicilian friend who had a shoestore also on the other side of the street in Chappel St. on North Virginia and he told his Italian friend not to move over there because the Ku Klux Klan had a lot of activity over there and they would march against the Klan and do those kind of things. Well they murdered, they hung the Italian fellow on a lamp post. He had 8 kids or 9 kids.

MN: Klu Klux Klan—

HC: The Klu Klux Klan murdered him and was very sad and that was one of the big shocks about racism to me as my mother told us the story about that. When my mother and her siblings moved from Virginia they left my grandfather there. He stayed in Northfolk with his brothers and sisters. He had 3 brothers and they decided to stay there and the young family wanted to go north, they wanted to migrate north their kids away from all of the horror. And my father they all agreed to go to New York. I hope I'm not confusing you.

MN: No, no this is interesting and now are there still Ashbys in Norfolk?

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

HC: Yes, Kermit, his son is a physician also now. And so he's in Norfolk as a doctor he's in the North end of Virginia, some heights. He's a physician there and a cousin of mine is a doctor there also. Doctor Centris. So as I said education was—

MN: Right, so now you are in Trinity Place. Where did you go from Trinity Av? Where was next stop?

HC: Next stop was Holmes st. in the Bronx. Between Union and Prospect.

MN: Union and Prospect right.

[crosstalk]

MN: And same kind of building?

HC: Same walk up.

MN: How many people were in the family when you moved?

HC: Well was my twin brother, my sister, my older brother in—

MN: Were other relatives who—

HC: my mother's twin sisters, they were around the corner in Steadman Av. 1231 Steadman's av. The building called bucket of blood. It was a notorious building it was across the street from PS 99 and that's the school I attended after leaving 23. They had a gifted program, and they called it talented or gifted or rapid class programs in the school. Basically started in school, I remember I was an artist, my brother was a musician, and they had a program connected to PS 54 in the Bronx. We moved from Holmes St. to Stedmans Av. and we had to move—here you go, yes moving a lot—to 1282 Stedman's Av. We weren't allowed to cross 169th st. so they said Harrison, Douglas and Francine you'll have to go to PS 54. We had the same program there and —

MN: Where's PS 54?

HC: 54 is on Intervale, between Intervale and Freeman.

MN: So that's a little further down.

HC: It's further down. Right across from down the street.

MN: Down the hill.

HC: Right down the hill.

MN: What grade were you in when all of this was going on?

HC: All this was going on in the third or fourth grade area.

MN: You're moving from place to place constantly—

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

HC: --father not at home

MN: --so this was a common thing for people in those days.

HC: Yes kind of. Yes. I mean the rest was like \$52 a month, it was pretty hard to get you know.

MN: So what happens is that you moved when you couldn't pay the rent.

HC: Yea we'd move, with my father disappearing with his job going to railroad and not coming on time with the money and the siblings, my mother's siblings pooling the money and looking out for each other and moving along.

MN: When did you move to Lyman Place?

HC: And then we moved to Lyman place, ok, we left 1282 while I was still in the fifth and sixth grade and went searching in Lyman place.

MN: What building was this? Across the street from--

HC: Across from the street from Walgen.

MN: When you moved to Lyman Pl. describe what Lyman place was like.

HC: It was like a wonderland, it was a mixture of Irish, some Italians, was the Espisio family, the Harris, well I can't name all the families, we all hung out together and we played regularly [unintelligible] and rode our bikes and studied together. It was Emilion Cruz, you know Emilio Cruz, the painter, he became a famous painter. He stayed on Steadmans Av. but we were friends we hung out together. But Emilio was one of the most popular, I guess most successful in that area. So Lyman Pl. Bob Guns, Frankie Robinson—

MN: How quickly did you meet Bob when you moved there?

HC: Bob was younger and we met, I knew his father before I knew him because his father used to, he was a sort of mentor type of guy, he would talk to the young people who were sitting around, you know see if he could come up with his newspaper, you know how you doing buster?

MN: So your nickname was buster?

HC: Buster yes.

MN: Did Bob have a nickname?

HC: No not that I remember. We just called him Bob you know, and his father was loved by a lot of people, but he would encourage us to you know continue our education asking what I was doing a lot of times, he used to see me drawing you know, drawing and doing different things. Speaking of Bob, my father almost adopted as he says Harrison as Buster said. And he would always remind me of the type of

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

person that Buster was and how I should be so for me Buster almost became a mentor because a lot of interest in art and the time that he took—

MN: So I knew Bob as an artist would you also—

HC: Oh yes. Yes I was born drawing.

[laughter]

MN: Have you been involved professionally as an artist?

HC: Yes. Well my career—yes that's all I did.

MN: So you started drawing without people in your family being artistic? It just started happening?

HC: Yes, it just started happening. I'd go in a room, and my older brother would bring lots of paper film from his office that he worked at. Stacks of them. 8 ½ X 11 paper and draw, draw, draw.

MN: Was this something that was encouraged at school?

HC: Yes, yes, yes. They had projects in the school that music, art programs at PS 54 that encouraged boys and girls at science, math, art, music and various other things. Shapiro, Dr. Shapiro and—

MN: You were also at 54?

HC:--Yes. That was the neighborhood elementary school.

MN: So people from Lyman place went to 54 not 99?

HC: Yes overwhelming. We were going a lot because—

MN: When you were going there what was the racial composition? Was it very mixed?

HC: Yes, very mixed. You see my graduation pictures it's predominantly white.

MN: Do you think young people are getting as good an education now as you got? This is something which I elaborate on it.

HC: For sure.

BG: It certainly is as Buster has stated that we were very fortunate because we had a very good elementary school then we had junior high school 40 which had a music and arts program so you certainly talk about a complete background even at level . it's unfortunate that today many young people don't have that. And born to be in a public school and having access to the arts.

MN: Many people have talked to me about the music program so what were the resources that you had access to as emerging artists? I don't know as much about music as I know about art so let's say there's an art program at PS 140 what does that involve?

HC: What does that involved in the arts side?

MN: Yes in the arts side.

HC: I had a teacher she was a mixture of Irish and Italian and Massela Minetti and she was awesome and she had graduated from PRAT, she was a PRAT graduate, art and design, and she was tough and what we were blessed to have this woman because she introduced us with tickets to the museums, to libraries, and research and various types of art, paintings, tiles, form Picasso to Rembrandt.

MN: She would take you to museum?

HC: Oh sure. Yes, I remember going on the train. Being on the train and having us sandwiches and everything.

MN: And this is on the weekdays during school?

HC: Yes, we'd take a day off, a day out of school.

MN: it would be a day trip?

HC: It'd be a day trip.

BG: All day at the Metropolitan Museum of Art?

HC: No that was the Guggenheim. Museum of Modern Art had been established around that time. I remember those two museum. The arts students lake and she had told us about PRAT, and that's wanted to go, always dreamed of going there, and in those schools [unintelligible] it is called art and design now, but that's what it was called when Bob ad I had attended. But she definitely had painting skills. She taught us how to appreciate the masters and you dint' have to copy but learn to paint and the different chromatic skills. All those skills I can't go into, the science of painting she told us. And so it was fascinating because she taught us how to paint the sky, the face, she said, I'll never forget, she always used to say "There's no such a thing as a white person" . And you know we started to laugh we'd look at her and say "but you're white" and she says " No" and she says, she takes the papers and scissors for comparison and say "This is white. Now look at my hand, look at my face. Do you see anything white there? It's not white. White is a what? That's what they call people black white but there's no such thing. I've red, green, and blood, she told us that when blood reaches oxygen it turns red, but you see the green on it. So when you paint a portrait you have to put green on it, you have to use red". She didn't play around. She was good. She prepared us. She was preparing us for freelance or music and art or anyone in the arts school that choose to attend at the time to make the story short. We got on the arts side, we studied some music. First time I heart Beethoven, Bach, Revel, all the classical, jazz. First time I ever heard, well first I listened around the house when my mother put it on on the radiio. But I knew about Armstrong from those people from my mother's side. But in school we got the classics and recently my mother was listening to the International Harvest Radio station which was a K from W I guess IQ or of the day. We also listened to two songs, my mother liked opera for some reason she liked Beethoven but we got a nice mixture. I know I'm going really fast. So I had music appreciation in

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

elementary school as well as junior high school. So a combination of jazz coming on one end classical on the other end, classical art, the museum of art, teaching us how to paint, we had a wonderful education. I don't see that today. I don't think there's any teacher around like Massela. I hope there is but I don't know if there's any.

MN: There probably are, but the programs are not institutionalized the way they were then.

[crosstalk]

HC: I don't see any teachers on the train. We would take time off to take class off. 25 children on the train, a white teacher, not having, without incident, we got in to the end--

MN: no cell phone

HC: on the subway, we'd get off on Lexington and walk up to 5th avenue and it paid very well.

[crosstalk]

HC: It was very important we pass the test. And I'll go on with that when I talk. Bob took Davio, Reese, Lewis, my friends in school we all took the test and Maurice and several other people we took the test for industrialized high school. And some of us passed some of us failed. I passed the test along with Maurice, Lewis, my friend Elvin Davio, and I was accepted around August, in the middle August I get this letter from Designer Mr. Titi stating that we don't have any room, we don't have—class size and so forth—so you will be attending the closest school which is the Morris high school which is in the Bronx, we're sorry to ba bat bat—so wow, my mother hit the ceiling so did I, I went into the room and shut the door she couldn't get me out of that room. So, my mother was a warrior, puts on her coat, and—we're going to see the song the first day of school so turned up. And she found a phone number told Missela I'm in no brag that I was one of her best students in her class. She knew that, she knew I had the skills. She had taught me everything and I did it well. I was a good student. And so she says this is not going to happen. Yes we're going to Dr. Levine, we'll go to the superintendent, and we're going to have everybody—I still remember the day Massela on the train with my mother, myself and Dr. Levine.

MN: He was the Bronx superintendent?

HC: The Bronx deputy. And we went to Dr. Keny and he was a pretty much, a racist. And he sat at the table, a tall guy of some 6' 5" a pretty domineering person. And "we don't have an unlimited table and ...mmhm" and he was upset because I had all these people, emerged on him you know. And you know they threatened to go to 110 Livingston St. and I didn't know what that was and yeah they had prepared letters, my teachers. They were going to challenge this method that they had, this quota system. We demanded a tour that day and walked around there were empty seats in every class we went through. Empty seats. Here there and everything and we came back. I remember taking notes and everything "oh" and my mother would laugh, I mean they couldn't even hide the lie. So we fought for a very short time and Missela called and well--

MN: What year was this?

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

HC: Junior high school, 1950. Because I graduated from art and design in '53. So two years. '49, '40.

MN: How many black students were there when you went there?

HC: About six.

MN: So he was definitely trying to maintain a racial—

HC: Oh yes.

MN: Did it change over time?

HC: Yes, I think what happened was—I don't think my letters were written to 110 Livingston St. and other things that followed up by Dr. Lavine and so many—and so on and so on besides other people complaining about quota system. And eventually saw, Bob came in, African Americans and Latinos came while I was attending school.

MN: I want to backtrack a little bit in terms of religion. What churches did your family attend in the Bronx. Were you involved with more than one church?

HC: Yes, we started with St. Augustine, with Reverend Hawkins. Reverend Hawkins was the pastor of the church at that time and he had all kinds of programs, he had art shows there and music it was an extension of —

MN: So what I see is that you have the culture at home, you have it nurtured in the school, and nurtured at church. Everything is there to bring your talents to the surface from home to school to church.

HC: Exactly. What we did was—I joined the scouts and they had music programs there. And then I joined the Minicing Program at Coldwell AME, African Methodist Episcopal church on the corner of Stevens and Freeman Chrisel. And they had the Minicing Program there and I joined it and eventually got into the church because St. Augustine—I wanted to play the drums and my brother wanted to play the bugle. So we had to join the church.

MN: So they had a cadet core at the Coldwell AME, but they didn't have that at St. Augustines?

HC: They didn't have it at St. Augustine. They had the St. Martin's cadet and the Scouts there and I grew with it and wanted to play the drums there and some crazy idea I had so I wound up playing the drums for five years you know.

MN: Your family stayed in Lyman place? They stayed there. From moving from place to place. How long did your family stay in Lyman place?

HC: Forever, I still have family here. My great nephew is here with his family. My older brother lived and died just recently about four years ago, he was living alone.

MN: Was Bunchy part of your group?

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

HC: Yes she was a very important part of our group. Her family emphasized education and when my brother played basketball to college--

MN: Yes her brother is still a coach. Oh her older brother?

HC: Freddie, yes I think he went into banking. Eventually after college.

MN: She was a very good athlete too, I hear. She said something like foul shooting record for—when she went to catholic school St. Anthrony of Padua.

HC: Yes St. Anthrony that's right. We grew up together, we played together. I remember bikes and hikes.

MN: At what point did Elmo Hope and Felonious Lunk cross your path as figures? Was this something fairly early?

HC: Early, yes. Yes. My literal window was opposite the Hope's living room window in the next building one flight down so I could look out of my living room into their living room and could see Elmo Hope practicing on his piano. Thelonious Monk, Red Allen used to come—Max Roach and on and on, Miles Davis also but I didn't remember him too well until we got to the 845 club. As we got older we would go to 845 but I watched them rehearse and he would sit on a stoop and talk to us and tell us "don't ever use drugs" Elmo Hope was high you know. But we had to follow order it didn't mean he would you know. But he would become—do great things and they were really nice guys. They would tell us about music and tell us all about jazz. I just thought they were musicians, just a bunch of guys practicing until I found out Elmo wrote some great pieces and became famous and was cutting records. Boy he was the pride of Lyman place and then we became teenagers and we met Longbay Brats, Barb and all of us thought --getting together getting with us. Small groups of guys, Frank Robinson and I can't remember all the names. We made our little trek up to Prospect Av. to the 845 Club.

MN: How old were you when you started?

HC: We had a good thick mustache. Old enough to sit down at the table and sit gingerale. [laughter] to listen to jazz.

MN: How old were you?

HC: Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen.

MN: Wow!

HC: Became interested in jazz at an early age because of Thelonious Monk.

MN: so growing up on this block made you jazz conscious?

HC: Definitely.

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

MN: So you had this combination of an interest in the art and also the interest in the music, but art to do and music to listen to.

HC: Music to listen to.

MN: You didn't have any illusions that you were going to be musicians?

HC: There were people in the group that became musicians. Right next door to me was what's his name again.

RG: Leo Mitchel.

HC: Leo Mitchel and the trumpeter who died recently he played with Gerry Mulligan. Al Gabino.

MN: Al Gabino was from your block?

HC: No he was from around the corner. Prospect Av. but he came in the block because it was like a mecca.

MN: Was he older than you guys?

HC: No he was our age.

MN: Because Maxine has done some work on him. He became a very talented—

HC: Yes.

MN: Did he go to junior high school 40 with you?

HC: Yes he went to 40 with us. He was introduced and enlightened by the structure there. Music and art pulled anybody in who was talented or took an interest in music and art. That was the school. Bob and I used to talk about, right down the street from 40 was junior high school called Herman Ritter. Herman Ritter was like a tombstone. I remember going into Herman Ritter one day in the lobby because one of my friends who had tended 40 with me, I'll think of his name in a minute, a Jewish fellow, we remained friends for years. I went to 40 but he went to Herman Ritter but we remained friends and I would meet him at the school and we would talk about school or what we were doing and he says "come on in and see the school" and I remember walking in the hallway and was put out of the school by a white teacher and told me I didn't belong in the school and to wait for, his name will come to me in a minute, to wait for him outside and I said "oh wow but he told me" and we knew we weren't allowed to go, blacks weren't allowed to go to Herman Ritter. All African Americans went to 40 which was a blessing in disguise. I don't think that Herman Ritter had the same programs as a matter of fact they did have it, Bernstein was his last name, they didn't have that program. We had that program, the gifted, or what they called it. The gifted talented program. That's all I know but they had another one there.

MN: Yes. Jimmy Owens, Joe Orange, 168th st. grew up as musicians trained and went to school.

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

HC: Yes and sports writer for Amsterdam news. Howie Williams. He was head of the monitor squad in the 40. [laughter] Yes I remember he was the head of the monitor squad. Great people.

MN: One of the things that Bob discussed, you had in a lot of ways a magical childhood and good education experiences but in some point drugs hit your block. How did you experience that. Was it something that you were aware of quickly or it caught you by surprise?

HC: That's a good question because when I first knew of it. The guys, I can't remember all the names, I remember the fellows coming back from the Korean War and they came back high. My older brother's friends he came back with—and I remember my mother telling me “does anybody do drugs” and so forth. These young guy, it was pathetic to see these healthy young warriors come back broken.

MN: What was interesting is that people talk about the Vietnam war that way but not about the Korean War and it might have had the same effect.

HC: The little white pills they gave them and my little brother told them, because my brother was in the Navy, about the pills that they gave him while they were overseas and told them to continue to take these pills. When they got back and these pills I don't know what they were cocaine, I don't know . But anyway they were high all the time. And I told Bob one day we would—

[End of side one Tape 1]

HC: working for a guy who had a motorcycle club. His name was Connie Come—he had a truck and we used to deliver newspapers in the morning. We'd meet him outside and he would take us around to different areas to sell the newspapers. Home news and the Pittsburgh Carrier and one day we got down early a Saturday morning, got came down early, the four of us, my twin brother, Jimmy Laison, Larry Laison, and –

BG: Hamilton Trup.

HC: --and we were all sitting in the truck waiting for Connie Come, but in the truck there was bags, brown bags and we thought there was lunch that he had there “ Oh Con gave us a lunch”. You know it was a staple at the time. We opened the bags up but inside the paper bags were a can of sterno, spoon, syringe with a little rubber thing on top and two packets of what we know now is drugs but white powder with the instructions typed, not handwritten, were typed. I found out after working with the government who was doing that later. So I said what's this? And so here comes Con and we said “hey we thought you were giving us sandwiches what's in there?” and he went ballistic he said don't mention blah and drug pushers” . He looked at it but he didn't really understand, he gets it as much as my mother did so I took him to my mother. And my mother sort of saw they were typewritten instructions on how to put the water, how to mix the water with the powder and the spoon and how to light the sterno. I'll never forget those neat—it was so neat, so well organized by a company because it's got to be a company. So my mother when she took all of us to the 41st precinct, I'll never forget that day, how cold it was, down Simpson st. so mad, she had tears come down so mad. I remember Jimmy Laison's mother had asthma, she couldn't walk the whole trip she had asthma attack along the way she

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

had to come back and my mother continued. About 7 am to the precinct. She took the bags ripped them open at the top dumped them they had at the precinct they had a table that was a little high up to the chest and the precinct sergeant saying "hey hold hold on what's going on" and she empties the bag and says look they're trying to make drug addicts of my children and children in Lyman place. They're delivering free drugs here you better do something about it she's going to write a letter and so forth and he says ok ok and we don't know. And she says I'm going to keep one bag cause I am going to the city hall or somewhere she was going to take --[laughs] she was adamant about this and we got --Larry's mother, Frankie's mother we were trying to stop the drugs. They were dispersing and trying to recruit young kids. That's when I became really aware of the real attempt to genocide—that was—that's the word my mother used she said bringing her Gaveyist movement background she says this --I'll never forget that word because I didn't know what genocide is—she said this is genocide. She sat down and told us see they are trying to destroy us.

MN: And this is in early—53,54?

HC: yes that was inside of 53 that was before that.

MN: Before you graduated?

HC: We were stil in junior high school when that happened.

MN: This was in the late '40s?

HC: That's right. Kids, young men were coming back from the Korean War which ended in the '50s the last part of that war was '51 I think

MN: ' 53.'

HC: '53 ok. Some of the guys were coming back in '50 when I had just gotten in high school and that's when I was making extra money delivering papers. So you're right around that time we were still teenagers, young kids around that time.

MN: Did your mother ever take you to Harlem?

HC: Oh yes.

MN: Was Harlem part of your Bronx experience? Was this something, a place you—

HC: Yes. The Harlem thing was wonderful because what happened was my older brother took my twin and I to Harlem to see the old neighborhood and the friends you know and we would search for my father as well. We were trying to find out where he was and so forth. What was going on because we had heard he was in Harlem. We ran into him once or twice, but the real story of Harlem is he took us around and he would introduce us to these wonderful people, Southern people like us. We would talk about the roots and my family, my mother who had come from Virginia also from Norfolk. We left them there when we moved to the Bronx so we went back to see them. And then when I joined the Minisink Cadets their base of operation was at the town house a block or two from City College on

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

Comben ave. across the street from Comben Av. Baptist Church so we would take the bus the trolley and the bus to Harlem every week.

MN: Did you go camp Minisink?

HC: Camp Minisink

MN: Did you meet Jim Cruit there?

HC: Cruit.

MN: So was he part of your contemporary—

HC: --exactly

MN: --and he was in PS 140 when you were there

HC: PS 40. All Cruit family, his sister, yes. All Cruits are an intricate part of—

MN: wow so the whole group that survived Minisink.

HC: Yes we were all warriors to survive. I remember we were up against the drugs and racism the police brutality.

MN: People haven't talked much about the police during these interviews. So how did the—what people did mention is if you went up the Grand Concourse they would chase you off, but was their brutality in the neighborhood or were they policing in boundaries?

HC: No I was beaten up by a policeman in the neighborhood just to give you an example. One morning, one Saturday morning, Larry was, no it was summertime. It wasn't a Saturday. It was the summer they were showing a movie, a John Wayne movie or something on Southern Boulevard so we were walking down to Carlyle Av. not on Intervale. And a policeman, a police officer was walking up the street and we just looked at him and said "Hi how you doin'" and he said "how you doin' boys? Come here. Where you going?. We say going to the movies. He says yeah. He says you live around here. We say yeah we live here. He says you look a fellow that were here before. We said we don't know what you're talking about we're going to the movies and he grabbed us by the collar and says you lyin', you lyin' little niggers [laughs] and bangs our heads together and took us into the school.

MN: How old were you then?

HC: The school—school was—I was a kid nine or ten years old.

MN: What?!

HC: I was ten. I was in school

BG: Elementary school.

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

HC: Yes ten. We were about 10, 11 years the most. 11 I remember I found out later. He took us to the school and the school doors were opened because they were giving free lunches in the area so they were preparing the free lunch that morning so he knew that those doors were opened cause he came in the morning. Took us to the staircase and started slapping us in the face and calling us niggers knocking us down and then got up and screaming and all of a sudden this cleaning lady, a white lady, came opened the door and screamed "what are you doing to those boys? I'm going to tell. I'm going to tell." He said mind your business and she ran away I'll never forget. She ran and said I'm going to get someone she dropped her things and ran in the hallway. So glad to see her because I thought he was going to kill us. He continued to slap us and he threw Larry down the flight of stairs and Larry went tumbling down the stairs and then he picked me up and threw me but you know in those days they had these gravings along [laughs] and I was lucky I put my hands I was going like this and I put my fingers in and I'll never forget that feeling of my fingers grabbing those graters and I was gone flying down the stairs and I was little. And we ran when we got to the bottom. He was mad.

MN: In those days did they have name plates or you couldn't—

HC: He was on foot

MN: So he didn't have a name plate with his name?

HC: No we ran home.

MN: Was this a common experience among young people?

HC: police beat you and we had an African American policeman Ching Low. He had a nickname. Ching Low. And he worked with, along with some authority in the government looking for some people who were [unintelligible] he was one of those guys who would attach himself. And I remember always when we would see him with these two white fellows someone was being hunted down. And he was known to pick up people in the alleys, the hallways, along with his wife and beat people that, I don't know what reason, most of the people he beat were older than I, so I don't know what the reason was. I heard later he was looking for [unintelligible] for numbers.

MN: Was there a numbers person on the block?

HC: Oh yeah plenty.

MN: More than one?

HC: More than one. [laughs] yes we had pretty Willie.

[laugher]

MN: Who was pretty Willie?

HC: Pretty Willie was a guy from Atlanta, Georgia. He was a cool guy you know he was, Technicolor clothes on and girls and was all polished and all tall.

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

MN: Did he have another job also?

HC: No he was the numbers runner.

MN: And he lived on the block?

HC: Yes he worked for the mafia you know the Italian guys who were located on Arthur Av. and he was a liaison he did the numbers in the black neighborhoods for the Italians in Arthur Av. so he recruited a few guys like Buckey and Rev and I remember Mr. Hope and the Chands. The Chandler brothers were popular and wealthy did the numbers—

MN: Were numbers relatively nonviolent in those days?

HC: Totally nonviolent. No it was acceptable. I mean you had a number you got to pay the rent by the who get the numbers, get three numbers, acceptable they paid on time.

MN: Was there any prostitution in the neighborhood or not anything visible there was no bars where you would see hookers out on the street

HC: Oh I don't recall any.

MN: So that was not part of it. The numbers was there and drugs but no prostitution.

HC: Covert.

MN: But it was covert it wasn't in your face. And was there a pimp on your block?

HC: Yeah not.

MN: There wasn't guy like this guy is the pimp, you didn't grow up thinking I want to be a pimp. That was a sixties—

[crosstalk]

HC: No he just had three or four girlfriends. There was a fellow named Count, Jack, and pretty Willie. And those were the numbers people that I remember from those days.

MN: What was it like going to Club 845 for the first time when you started to hear—

HC: The jazz?

MN: Yes

HC: Oh it was nice. It was very well respected, cool, nice place, managed well. They would let us to come in, allow us to sit in the corner and drink a can of gingerale and listen to Miles Davies, Hope, lots of other people whose names I don't recall, Red Allen, most of the names I don't recall. And we'd go up and be you know introduced—

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

MN: This was in the '50s right?

HC: Yes

MN: Were you aware of Latin music also at that time?

HC: Sure. Tita Fuente.

MN: So you were exposed to Latin music on Lyman pl.?

HC: It was playing neck and neck the amount of exposure which was great because we heard about it and we said the lady oh the palladium.

MN: so did you ever go to the—

HC: the hunts point first.

MN: Did you learn to dance latin?

HC: Sure.

[crosstalk]

HC: and west Indian. And what's his name Lord--

MN: Name the West Indian performers who came to the Bronx.

HC: Money Sparrow

MN: Money Sparrow. Did he ever play at Huntspoint?

HC: Oh yes it was packed we danced to him so good. White people, black people, Spanish people. What was so great about the neighborhood was that you had whites, blacks, Spanish, Jews, Italians, everyone would come to the Dallas and Mckinley ballroom.

MN: Where was McKinley? McKinely was at—

HC: Boston Road.

MN: Oh Boston Road.

HC: Yes right there .

MN: And everybody would dance to whoever was funny. Mighty Sparrow, Tito Fuentes,--

HC: Joe Cuba

BG: Lord Kitchener

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

MN: Lord Kitchener was there.

HC: Senor Rodriguez on the violin. We have to admit we lived in a perfect time.

MN: Arsenio Rodriguez? You got to hear him? Did you ever go to the Tropicana Club?

HC: A few times, I didn't care about it much it was small it wasn't big enough for me.

MN: It was also the Royal Mansion up on Boston Road but mainly the Huntspoint Towers and McKinley.

BG: McKinley Ballroom, Huntspoint Towers were the two, and 845 Club were the three places,

MN: What was interesting—what about rhythm and blues? Was that part of your background also?

HC: There were the Feaster brothers, Carl Feaster and Rod Chebou.

MN: Right Chebou, they were on Jennings. Was there a difference between the jazz people and the Duat people? Was it a different crowd? The jazz people more like intellectual, or artsy?

HC: Yes sort of vanguard, is that the word, at a higher, because they studied music. We had like Monk and Miles, these people, I don't know what Monk did but other could read and write music. But the Duat fellows had the Feaster and Freddy Lyman used to come in the area, I can't name them all. My cousin was part of the Hear Tods. Jean Red who became the founder of Cool and Again.

MN: So he was your cousin?

HC: Yes cousin by marriage. Married the second cousin. So going back to your question. It's mainly rhythm and blues and desto was part of ice ground basement called salsa. They would rehearse. [unintelligible] My voice came and my voice changed overnight. He said "wow boy what did you do to the base". We had lots of fun and I didn't take it serious because I had other directions.

MN: Right now where did you meet Alan Bay and how old were you and where did you meet him for the first time. School or--?

HC: Yes.

MN: He was also art and design?

HC: Oh yes art and design kind of guy. Yes because he grew up on Telley St. with Apollo and –

MN: He was in what they called it Sissy Kelly, somebody told me that there was the tenement on Telley St. where Collin Powell grew up and the brownstones where Alan Bay grew up and they used to call it Sissy Kelly down by St. Margarets because the kids from the tenements thought they were tougher than the kids who lived in the Broadway.

HC: Always yes, always.

[crosstalk]

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

HC: But I think I met Alan Bay before, wait, yes, Alan Bay came to Lyman place when Monk and all of them used to write. I remember him coming on the block before I met him at the Art and Design High school. He came along with his brother with some of his friends from Kelely st. and he introduced himself to us and we became like friends. I'd go to Kelly's sometime and he would come to Lyman pl. we'd go up to 845 then all of a sudden I saw him again and we were in Art and Design High School.

MN: When did you guys became aware of Carlos Cooks and some of the people who were talking about black pride and the more recent manifestations of the Garvey activists? Was this in High school or after?

HC: I'll tell you what happened. I got away from Garvey type of movement because of things I'm into in the Bronx. And we didn't have a strong Garvey movement in the Bronx. We had people who said to us like Father Divine and we had the muslims who came in to help poor, really poor people, on welfare but then the Garvey movement was there but it wasn't as pronounced as some of the church movements.

MN: Were there any people from the communist party in the Bronx or was it never much there by the time you were there?

HC: Eh I heard about the communists but—

MN: So they weren't a big force?

HC: No no no. Elvie—I remember giving us pamphlets and what not but I wasn't interested in politics at that time and my direction was Civil Rights and so forth through the church. And we got involved with SCLC.

MN: Oh yeah so I called them OAME had a relationship with —

HC: Yes they had a relationship with the movement in the South and people would come to our church and speak to us about what was going on and we heard about this guy called Martin Luther King, you know Martin Luther King who is that? And then all of a sudden the party took over and, oh boy when we first heard Malcolm X we were like God sent somebody and laughed. We heard him speak in Harlem I'll never forget it, 139th st. and Atlantics Av. , 129th and Atlantics by Harry Todman school and I said oh my God. He was speaking to our souls.

MN: How old were you when you first heard him?

HC: I was about 22, 23.

MN: so this would be '58-'59?

HC: '58-'59. I just—cause we were in Harlem all the time with the group over the Minisink camp.

MN: So what were you doing for work when you were—

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

HC: Oh yes during that time at the high school I attended PRAT and working during the day and I forgot the name of the studios and fighting the racism within the system because we African Americans weren't allowed to work in a lot of it. Advertising.

MN: Oh yes advertising was notorious. Probably to this day.

MN: I mean I'd go to advertising I told Bob I was—what was the one I told you about the British agency—it will come to me in a minute. Doyle Dane and Burt Back. Doyle Dane I'll never forget his name, I went in for an interview and the receptionist gone to meet this—the employment agency sent me there it was Mrs. Murry—the famous employment agency said it African American agencies [laughs], maybe places, Jewish agencies would hire. Great advertising was Jewish they would hire a lot of the Gentile, a lot of the Eurocentric guys, I wasn't involved. They would not hire African Americans but she would send us to one. She sent me to one, Can Erikson and Baby Do You Know, and Doyle Danenberg. Doyle Dane was a British agency and we walked in and there was a British flag on the hallway [laughter] and I'll never forget and if you're African American to see this flag wasn't exactly a friendly thing to see. It was exactly like seeing a confederate flag. And I said "oh wow British" and I said there and the receptionist said "hello how you doing you're going to see the art director today tadatada" and I said "yes" she said "do you want a job here? You want to work here?" and I said "well yes" and she said let me tell you there are no negroes here. She said that if you had a job here who would you talk to there aren't many negroes around here. So I said you know what I get the job I'll talk to you. Said you like to talk so rich would you talk to me if I get the job. She said uh what did you say? And we argued at the table as we were talking. And I said I know if I get the job you'll talk to me because you're maybe the only person who will talk to me. [unintelligible] He looked at my portfolio and he says that's good that's good he says "look you're just missing one or two things for me we were looking for someone who had a lot of package design and layouts and you don't have a lot of that in your portfolio but we'll give you a call" that area in New York area some time and I walked out. And that was the type of thing that Bob and I and all the people who graduated from art and design faced if you were African American or Latino. And that's what we faced.

MN: So what fields did you work over the years? Did you work in advertising?

HC: I worked in advertising but I didn't—we were just—

MN: Did you work in advertising mostly or did you, you know what are some of the positions you've held over the years?

HC: Oh ok I finally got a job as a freelance layout kind of guy at BEG an advertising agency and I met two art directors Alfonse Nomandio, I'll never forget and Louis Figueroi two Italian guys. Wonderful human beings and they said you know what [laughs] Harrison you know the looks that you get when you come in because you are the only negro and on the floor in the agency here. I said I could tell and he says you're good though you're really—you have what we need. Louis Figueroi left the office and would come back and said we could use you but you can't work on staff because we could use you as a freelancer. I was broke. and he says you can work in our room between Louis's room and mine and you

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

can do some illustrations and I knew how to use airbrush and all that stuff. I did airbrushing and all that stuff so tried to get airbrushing but I was very busy and all the skills I acquired from rejection. Every time somebody would tell me that I didn't have something I'd go home and save my money on getting airbrushing and practice. And plus in PRAT we were learning new things all the time. So it was good I was going to school in the evening and working as a freelance guy for many years like that I would go leave Luther and work at BBD for about four years on and off, freelanced for other people. Finally got a job with Sesame Street with the electric company doing the same thing, doing animation. I went back to school, School of Visual Arts to study animation. And I studied animation learned some animation, met Pablo Theroux who graduated from my school became a famous, became the principal animator in the United States for Alfred Hitchcock he got Triple Fools and Messaging. He and I hooked up later on I freelanced worked for him and he told me—refined animation skills for me did background forms since I knew how to airbrush and painting we did everything so I got so many different skills that way and kind of got me into the union and Screen Cartoons union. And I said wow, since I freelanced you can work on staff in the union shop for 30 days to get in the union. On the 28th day in every place I went I was let go. On the 28th or 29th or maybe the 26th day, always in the high twenties though I would be let go. And Pablo couldn't afford to put me in the staff but the other studios would hire me instead but would let me go after I worked there for almost a month. And I said oh man, I look down the line and you know what I'll never be able to see a family at this pace. I'll be a poor guy if I stay in this business so I told my mother I'll join the police force. I want to do something where I can get pension and so forth like a lot of my friends that Bob and I know. They suffered because of racism and so they joined transit, sanitation, city jobs, state jobs, and so that was what I was going to do. I was going to fall into that category after being in the streets and not being let in the union. A lot of people don't realize how tough it was. So my mother went ballistic, she was crying, she said you big mouth, you might get shot and killed you know, police will beat you up. I never forget that. And I said oh ma I'll do the best I can you know. So she cried and carried on and I went to pass tests and to school and I'll never forget sitting in the classroom and the instructor was a retired policeman and he says to the class that these are the neighborhoods that you will have to crack some heads in and he named the neighborhood I grew up in, the south Bronx, Simpson st. area. For the pension. In Harlem in these areas. [laughs] And he said you know who lives in these areas right and he's talking to the white kids who were predominant in the class. I got up and walked out. I said I know knowing myself that something is gonna happen real bad if I stay beneath. So I decided to, oh I was at—where was I—at an employment agency again and trying to struggle with school and freelancing and they said hey Harrison there's a job with the government and they said they don't pay much but yeah it's a job. I said it was temporary, temporary for a year or so would you like to try that. I said yeah I could work all year so I go over to this place called the Army Pictorial Center in Long Island City which was a grey strings of buildings, used to be the only sound studio in New York and they asked me if I would like to work in the animation department. I said yeah sure. And so I sent the application and said well you have to have a background check and they called me back. They said I don't know if you will be able to get the job Harrison you were arrested in '40 for—what did you do? You know if you have been arrested you cannot work for the United States government and so forth. I said I was never arrested I don't know what you're talking about. And they said one time the policeman slapped me around and my mother went to the precinct and so forth. I remember the policeman taking

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

my name but I was never arrested I went home. And she said oh yeah? Jesus you better look into that. We want to hire you but before we do that you have to be investigated by the FBI so they sent me to the 68th st. and park av. the FBI office there. I was in the room with three FBI agents and this guy says. I'll never forget this day as long as I live. This guy says oh so you are looking for a job with the government and they say they really need you because you have the different things that you do, airbrush and animation. Harrison why did you do it? One of the agents says. I says do what? And he says why did you get yourself in trouble in the Bronx in the South Bronx with the gangs and everything. And then you slipped though everything. They said we know you could slip through things because you slipped though Fort Apache and I said I tried fought my way though in some cases. Jumped the fence, did some time you know we were having a laugh they knew about things and what not. So they said Harrison wait a minute you were 11 years old and put you on the blotter when you were 11 years old? So that was the end of that and walked out left the other two guys to answer. When do you want to start working and by the way you can have a copy of this in case you want to see. And you can sew you know you were 11 years old and they put you on the blotter and could ruin. He said did you ever have a hard time finding jobs he said because this has been following you. And I said wow and got really angry and I said probably—I remember at the Jay Walter Thompson was that what it was—you see that's what kept me from getting a job. There is a reason for this in your background we can't explain he says you can't work here. I think it was either Uni Rubicon or Jay Walton Thompson. And I couldn't get the job and I told the FBI agent I remember that one incident where I was sure I would've gotten the job he says that's probably what it was. He gives me a package and gave me a manila folder and says go back cause you have to have go back to Pictorial Center to have a secret clearance to work in this department and I got the job. There I met lots of people doing lots of things.

MN: And you've been doing this ever since?

HC: And I've been doing that freelance at CDW 72nd st while I was at Army Pictorial. I would work in the studio and work for Stay Laken remember him and did graphics for him. And left there went on to Westpoint where I retired doing the artwork of —became the manager of the digital imaging department of Westpoint when I graduated. And when I graduated, I shouldn't say graduated because I retired from there—when I retired form Westpoint I was a manager of the digital imaging branch which is computer graphics at Westpoint Military Academy.

MN: Right and that's where you retired from. How did you guys stay in touch for 30 years?

HC: We never lost touch.

MN: You worked in the same area?

HC: Same area and what I started to say earlier when the subject of my father came up.

BG: My father was almost adopted Buster. My oldest brother —and I always give him credit for whatever success I've had in the art field because he became a mentor and that's one of the things when I think back and growing up on a block like Lyman Place. Because I had benefited somewhat from this older talent and encouraged me to pursue the career that he did and eventually I did and that bond that we

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

established on Lyman Pl. continued I believe. I think it was more than just the fact that we--due to our backgrounds. It was the fact that we came from a unique neighborhood. And we shared culturally.

MN: Were you also part of the jazz arts society?

HC: For a short time yes I did. I joined Bob, Long Day and Bob and some other fellows and as they branched out I moved more in my. I moved away from Lyman pl. I moved to the North Bronx, Paulding Av. so I got disconnected but we stayed in touch I didn't really stay with the jazz—

MN: In summary is there something you would like to say about your experience to young people today about things that you learned or you'd like to see revive that you benefitted from?

BC: Well certainly when it comes to education, public education the idea of taking out programs or offering programs particularly to young students is something I wish returns back to public schools because particularly in urban centers where you have talent but there's no place where it can express itself. See that was one of the benefits that we had.

MN: Did you go to afterschool centers at all or it was—did you go to 99?

BC: I didn't as much.

HC: I did. We did plays there we did music jazz, basketball teams, I joined the fencing team. We went to Columbia University.

MN: At the 99? They had a fencing program?

HC: Yes we were so good that Columbia wanted to challenge us and we beat the Panther.

MN: Do you remember Mr. Tids?

BC: Mr. Tids from—

MN: from the 99 the big powerful guy.

HC: Yes he was a mentor. He organized the fencing teams, basketball teams and everything and we said fencing. He bought the equipment. We didn't realize that we were good at snapping a wrist if a guy—

BC: You see you again we had afterschool programs. 54 for example was opened.

MN: 54 was opened every day.

BC: yes so once again after all those school hours you could go back at night and play basketball, here again, this is what is missing

[crosstalk]

MN: well they have the school lunch now.

[crosstalk]

HC: But you don't see that today

BG: Once again you talk about these afterschool programs even the teachers in addition to teaching during the day they came back at night. So that was—their involvement was—

HC: We grew up during the time when there was only one African American teacher in 40 remember?

BC: Yes.

HC: And in PRAT, I mean in Art and Design there was only one Mr. Allen who became a mentor. One African American teacher in the '50s.

BC: So I was saying anything—in terms of opportunities that we had growing up in the South Bronx and a particular block in a particular place there was so much to offer. So when we talk about issues such as gangs for example on Lyman pl. there was never any need for any gangs because there was so much.

HC: Although we were attacked one time and we drove them off

[crosstalk]

BC: Yes. There were gangs around us but no. what I always say about Lyman pl. is that it was such a unique place that it attracted people from all over the world.

[crosstalk]

HC: It was a conduit because people had to come through Lyman pl. to get to Crotona. People came to the other side Simpson st. Latinos, blacks and whites from that area. To come to the Crotona Park they had to go at Lyman pl. We had stickball team we can play with you guys, we had a basketball team, we had a skating team, you've got to come and challenge us.

BC: One of the unique things that I remember about Lyman pl. was the relationship between the old, the younger, and old boys in this case. It was that. And in many ways they kind of looked after the younger the thing about Bunkie for example. He was a former marine. And he like took it upon himself to mentor younger people, particularly those who didn't have fathers in their home, had some issues. I don't know if they still have that today.

HC: No. The fellow with the motorcycle R. Combs. Lots of people your father.

[END OF TAPE 1 SIDE 2]

BC: Yes it was perhaps because of the size of the block but it was such a unique—

HC: What happened when the Army Pictorial Center closed I decided I was going to give something back so what I did was—they had a nine o one—they were looking for teachers in District 5 in Harlem and I didn't have an education license but they were hiring professionals with a 901—or902 license. You

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

know more about that. So I said yes a friend of mine told me about that and he said why don't you come on over because we need art teachers and you are an animator there's also photography and photographers all there and bababah. We had customized curricula we needed for language arts and so on and they explained the whole thing to me and so I got excited about that I said hey I'll do it. So I was hired by District 5 to come in and teach animation. I taught animation, layouts for advertising, how to do a layout, how to do storyboards, how to set up for—they had to write a story in English class and language arts, had to come back with their own script, present it to me, work out our story boards. It was great. We were looking out of the window at the drug addicts all over down the street and we'd go down with the camera and show the boys and girls and say this is what can happen to you if you do this. It was fantastic. And for training what they did was that they sent us out and about you know.

MN: Yes I know about that. [laughs]

HC: I thought I'd never come back.

MN: [laughs] Leave you out in the woods and find your way back.

HC: The thing I was telling Bob—the funny thing about it when they sent us out my friend Micky—we went through it very easy, you know why because we were running on rooftops. We were going by fire escapes and clothes lines and they said where did you learn all this stuff? We went through this course. The only hard part of the course I had to stay on this island for four days by myself and it was weird but the thing is when we came back we were ready. The kids, the white kids from Lexington were excited because they had got that experience you know. They were coming into Harlem but they didn't need it because they were thirsty for knowledge. I remember we couldn't get out in an hour in our class. It was a great program. But what I wanted to say as suited the powers that be saw this program working, we had the Montessori, we had headstart, we had all kinds of things in the District in the school, CS 39 and IS 201 where I – and I'd go back and forth to those two schools in junior high and the elementary school and they shut the program down. The federal government pulled the money in and the state took the money out.

MN: And this was in the '80s or the '70s?

HC: This was in the '70s. Early '70s then I left to Huntspoint. And I said oh my God how could they end the program. And I thought I would go ahead and finish my education got and did my license.

MN: Oh wow so this would have been perfect.

HC: This would have been perfect but they shut down the thing and I needed a job.

MN: Was this in the mid '70s?

HC: '70, '71, '72, '73 ended in '73 I think. Shut down.

MN: That was when New York was going through—

[crosstalk]

Interviewee: Harrison Cruse Jr.

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Date: October 6, 2010

MN: All the stuff was cut.

HC: All the stuff was cut. Because I remember '74 was the poorest time I had ever been and I was about to go home. And that's when I called—went to 26 Plaza and gave my background and said hey there's a job but it was too far away for you, you don't want that. I said where? He said Westpoint I said where's that oh Westpoint, I was an army guy when I was a kid you know and a football guy and I said hey [unintelligible] so I'll take it.

MN: So that's where you've been ever since.

HC: Right.

MN: Well this was great.

HC: Well we still did freelancing. Bob and I, we had plans to do things and pain.

MN: Fantastic. What a great interview.

[END OF INTERVIEW, END OF TAPE 2]