THE HOBOKEN PUBLIC LIBRARY
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: TOM OLIVIERI

INTERVIEWER: ALISA DEL TUFO

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SIDE ONE

Q: We're going to talk to Tom Olivieri about his life in Hoboken. So, Tom, would you like to start at the beginning? I actually interested in knowing if you were born here or someplace else, and anything about your own family or origin.

A: Well, I'm the oldest of four children, of Puerto Rican origin. My mother and father are from Puerto Rico. I have a last name that is considered to be Italian, here -- Olivieri -- but the truth is, my grandfather was from Corsica, which is an island off the coast of Sicily. In fact, that's where Napoleon was born. My grandfather was born in Corsica, and for one reason or another he wound up in Puerto Rico in the early 1800s. I've always wondered what path he took, or how he got there.

Q: You don't know whether he was a merchant marine or something like that.

A: He wasn't a merchant marine. My father said it had to do with political turmoil there, and he and his brother left. They wound up in Puerto Rico. They spoke French. At that time, Corsica was a French possession, and it's gone back and forth between France and Italy. I think right now it's still French, or French once again. I think that's where the Foreign Legion -- the French Foreign Legion -- has its headquarters now. I always wanted to visit there. Maybe someday I'll go.

We came to Hoboken in the early '50s, and one of the first experiences I had here was meeting a kid in "Wallace School" --

Q: That's where you went to school?

A: -- in the fifth grade (right], who had the same last name as me; a boy by the name of Joseph Olivieri. In fact, his sister is married to the former public works director here in Hoboken, Roy Hack. Lucille Hack. I remember going up to him, because of the same last name (thinking he was Puerto Rican], and asking him if he spoke Spanish, and him giving me a blank look.

Q: And was he Italian?

A: He was Italian. So Olivieri is considered to be an Italian name.

Q: Well, I'm Italian, and my name is often thought of as a Spanish name. So that's kind of a funny thing.

Why did your family move to Hoboken?

A: Well, back in the late '40s and early '50s the economy in Puerto Rico wasn't what it is today. There were harder times. It was right after the Second World War. My father had been in the army. In fact, my father was working for the U.S. government when we came here; when we came to the United States. We always lived near army camps in Puerto Rico, and most army camps are near the beach. So I've always had a memory of Puerto Rico, of the beach. I was ten years old back then, when we came here.

Q: Did you live in urban Puerto Rico, or rural?

A: It was mostly rural. We lived near San Juan, but at that time what is now called the metropolitan area in Puerto Rico, the town we lived in last -- which is a town by the name of "Catano," which is right on San Juan Bay, across from the city of San Juan -- was not part

of the metropolitan area. So it was more rural, even though it was only a ferryboat ride away from San Juan.

Q: Just like New York.

A: Just like New York. It was a similar situation, between Hoboken and New York. San Juan Bay is probably as wide as the Hudson at this point -- about a mile wide -- and it was a very pleasant experience. I've always had those imprints in me of the beach, the beach scene, the beauty of the blue and the green, and I've never forgotten that. So what was imprinted in me back then and what was taught to me by my mother and father, or to our family, my family here, has always stayed with me. So we've kept our basic customs -- the language, the music, the food -- just our general culture, to the extent that when I go to Puerto Rico, even though we've been here fifty-two years (we came here in 1949], even though when we came here I was ten years old, those memories, those imprints I've always had with me. In fact, I used to have a recurring dream, for a long time after we came from Puerto Rico, where I walked the route from my school to our house. My mother used to bring us lunch at school, and used to walk us to school in the morning and pick us up at 3:00. In my dream I was walking that route, always. Basically, every night I used to dream that. It was nostalgia.

Q: Those early memories; they don't go away.

A: No, they don't. We came here in October; in a month like October, where, right now, for you or I, who have been here so long, October's not really a cold month. But when you come from a tropical place like that, and you wind up in a -- when you come from that beach scene, where you have green and you have blue water, clear water and blue skies, and you come to a place like Hoboken, in October, where the trees have no leaves -- already the trees look basically -- We came through New York. We lived in New York three months prior to coming to Hoboken --

Q: With family or something?

A: With family. It was my mother and father and the three children, and we came to my aunt's house until my father got a job. So we were there basically like three months, in what is now known as Washington Heights.

Q: Uptown.

A: Yes. Uptown. One-hundred-sixty-sixth street and Amsterdam Avenue. And I did go to school in New York for those three months. A totally different experience. It was like culture shock, not so much because of the language -- I don't remember not knowing the language. My father spoke English. He worked for the government. Very smart man. He was truly bi-lingual. He liked to show us off, and he would teach me English and whenever his friends would come, or somebody from the family, he would ask me questions in English and it was my duty to answer him in English. He was thrilled by that. People would, go, "What -- ." So I don't remember not talking English, not understanding, but it was culture shock in the sense that, when you were coming from that beautiful scenery to a barren place, as far as I was concerned -- big buildings, huge buildings -- everything looked grey to me.

Q: Where there you had trees and grass and ocean, here you had concrete and asphalt.

A: Yes. And leafless trees. Exactly. So to me, in my mind, I see those days as sort of, like, grey. If I was watching a black and white movie, that's the way --

But we lived in New York about three years [sic], and I would say around the beginning of January of the following year, '50, we

came here to Hoboken. I was raised right here on Willow Avenue, in what used to be known then as the Tootsie Roll Flats, which is this immediate block right here. There are nine houses there with fifteen apartments in each building -- nine buildings -- "Applied" Housing has that now. But there were nine buildings at fifteen, so there were 135 apartments.

Q: Why was it called Tootsie Roll Flats?

A: Because most of the people who lived there worked for the "Sweets Company of America" -- Tootsie Roll -- which was right on Fifteenth & Willow -- 1500 Willow Avenue -- where Macy's now has stores, "their floats," right there. My father didn't work for Tootsie Roll. We were one of the families who didn't work for Tootsie Roll. It was a Hoboken atmosphere that was totally different from the way Hoboken is now. Totally different. We were the second Puerto Rican family on that block, actually. We got an apartment there through my cousin, Eddie "Torres," who's now in California. Eddie's got to be in his eighties now. I haven't seen him in a while. I plan to go out there, maybe next year, maybe even later on this year, to see him. He had just been discharged from the army, and he got an apartment there. He used to work for the Ford Motor Company. At that time they were right here, in Edgewater, where that mall is. Yes. Ford. They had a big plant here. From there they moved to Mahwah, New Jersey.

Q: Yes, Mahweh I remember, when I grew up they were in Mahweh.

A: From here to Mahweh.

Q: So you lived here, and that's the connection for your immediate family. You think that's how your parents decided to move to Hoboken.

A: Oh, yes. Definitely. Eddie lived here. He told my father about Hoboken. He had just moved in. It's not that he had lived here a long time. He was a New Yorker. They had been here since the early '40s; a big family. That's a nice story, too. A big family -- fourteen children. My aunt became widowed at an early age, after her last son was born. So, basically, she had to raise all these kids, and she raised them well. No problems. Nothing dysfunctional. An excellent family. She had a whole bunch of boys and a whole bunch of girls, the oldest kids pitched in, and everything worked out for them. She passed away a couple years ago. She was ninety-seven.

Q: Your family lives a long time.

A: Yes. My mother, God bless her, just passed away. She was ninety-four. I miss her so much.

So Eddie got an apartment for us here. Prior to that, before, though, my father had come here, and he got a job in a factory right around the corner here, right behind where you used to live, on Tenth & Clinton. In fact, 1023 Clinton Street. They used to make rubber sandals. Well, I think they were actually canvas sandals -- The top was canvas, the sole was rubber, and his job was to glue them together, and all that. He got a job there. That was his first job in this country. Then we moved here.

Eventually, my father was able to obtain what they call a "stationery fireman's license." A stationery fireman is the person who takes care of the heating system in a building, and back then it was coal. So he was in charge of five buildings -- 1000 Clinton Street, 1006 Clinton (that's where Applied Housing -- 1000 is where Applied Housing had their building] --

Q: Right. Right. Right.

A: Where the parking lot is, that used to be 1006 Clinton. There was a big factory building there. Ten-fifteen Grant, 1009 Grant [actually there were six buildings], 1015 Clinton Street [there used

to be a toy factory there], and 1023. Now that's all been converted to condos.

Q: Yes. Everything's being converted to condos.

A: For a while there were lofts there.

Q: Yes, we knew some people who had artists' lofts in there.

A: Now they're being converted to condos. Yes. And my father became a stationery fireman, and he was a combination fireman there and handyman, so he took care of the elevators, he did the windows.

Q: Were they owned by the same --

A: They were all owned by a man whose name was Philip Greenberg. Mr. Greenberg, a Jewish man. Very good to my father. They became very close friends, so it was more than --

Q: More than just a working --

A: -- an employer/employee relationship. I don't know -- Mr. Greenberg sold those buildings. In the early '70s he wound up selling them. I remember he gave my father a $25,000 bonus. And my father was the kind of guy who was so responsible. He would work Sundays, anytime anything was needed he was there.

Q: Whatever the tenant needed.

A: He had a place there where he would sleep, sometimes. So concerning my father's employment, that was it. He worked there, basically, until he retired. My father passed away in 1974. He was eighty years old. If my father was alive now, he would be 106 years old. He was born in 1894. My mother was twelve years younger than him. Twelve years younger. When my mother and father got married, he was forty-four and she was thirty-two.

Q: She was thirty-two when she married?

A: When she married. Thirty-two years old. She was a spinster. For those times, she was. She was. I'm the oldest, so my father was forty-five years old --

Q: That's old for a man, even, right?

A: That's old for a man.

Q: Had he been married before?

A: Never. Never. My father, prior to that -- He had been in the army for a long time, and before being in the army, going way back, he had lived in Cuba. He lived in Cuba for about thirteen years. He went there to work. Someplace around here, in the house, I have his work permit, that's got his photograph, from Cuba. I don't know if we'll find it. If I find it, I'll show it to you. You don't know where it is, do you, Marty? That paper, all those papers with the photos. See if you can find it. Because it's an interesting document. They called Puerto Rico "Porto" Rico. Can you believe that?

Q: Did a lot of the men who lived in Hoboken work in Hoboken at that time? It sounds like --

A: Yes. Hoboken at that time was a very industrial town. Hoboken was a town that had a lot of factories that dealt with garments, principally, women's clothes. That was the big thing. There were dresses -- But I remember the garment -- So there was a big industry here, where a lot of the people who lived here, worked here. Not

only garments. There were huge companies. You had Lipton Tea. Of course, you've got those Lipton Tea apartments there, now. You had Standard Brands -- you know, the people who make the cereals and that. You had Tootsie Roll. You had a huge factory right here on Eighth & Monroe (there's an empty lot there, now), called -- It'll come back to me -- Rego Electric. Rego Electric employed a lot of people. Then you had all the other --

Q: And General Electric, too, right? Didn't General Electric -- ? Or was that storage, mostly? Didn't they have a Mercy vapor lamp --

A: -- where that building --

Q: Yes. The Mercury Building.

A: I don't remember them too well. I really don't. I was surprised to hear that. But I guess if they owned that building -- But I don't think they actively did stuff there. One-Thousand Clinton Street was a building that had a big lamp factory, there, too.

Q: Levelor --

A: Levelor Blinds, on Eighth & Monroe, around there, where that artists' -- I think it's 720 Monroe.

Q: Something like that.

A: You also had Hostess Cake, and you had Wonder Bread.

Q: Oh, Wonder Bread I never --

A: Wonder Bread -- Do you know where the high school is, on Eighth and --

Q: Clinton?

A: Yes. Between Eighth & Ninth. Okay, the building right across from the high school, on that side, where they have the warehouse now? The Spanish warehouse? That was Wonder Bread. Sure. Then you had Hostess Cake, on 14th Street --

Q: And Mighty-Fine? Right? Weren't they in town?

A: Mighty-Fine on Clinton? I don't remember. If they were, I don't --

Q: I thought they were way downtown, where -- What's the chocolate -- ?

A: By "Van Lear's."

Q: Yes. Right by Van Lear's.

A: You're right. That's right. You're right.

Q: And then the whole waterfront. You had --

A: The waterfront was active.

Q: Bethlehem --

A: You had Bethlehem Steel, you had, of course, Maxwell House, and you had the waterfront where Eleventh Street now goes into Sinatra Drive. All that area was fully active. That was not an area to stroll. It was not an area for pedestrians to walk down or ride bikes, or anything like that. At that time it was all cobblestones. It was a

depressing area, because it was all work. There was no view to Manhattan from there, unless you actually got on the other side of the buildings. There were a lot of low buildings there, because it was an active "park." I remember the Holland American Lines had their docks at Fifth Street, by the river, where David Anthony now has that cafe.

Q: Yes. Right.

A: That was the area of the Holland America lines. You can catch a glimpse of that if you look at the movie, *On the Waterfront*, with Marlon Brando. The final scene -- or a lot of the movie concerning the docks -- was filmed right there. That's where ships like the Rotterdam and the New Amsterdam (this was the Holland American Lines], and I remember that's where they filmed that final scene, where Marlon Brando fights --

Q: Whoever he is.

A: -- Johnny Friendly, played by Lee J. Cobb. I was there.

Q: You watched that?

A: I watched when they filmed a lot of that. We used to come out of school -- in 1954 -- while they were doing that movie, and we used to rush to be the area. I'll always remember clearly, vividly, Fourteenth & Garden, where Frankie & Johnnie's on the Waterfront is. That bar was owned by a man I remember -- Ben. I don't know his last name. Benny. And that's it.

I thought I'd show you this. That's my father.

Q: Oh, my goodness. Wow. He looks so young. He looks like a boy.

A: I think he was twenty-six years old. What year was this?

Q: What nice paper. He went to Catholic school.

A: I don't know what year this was. Yes, he was twenty-six years old. So that means that he was born in '94 -- So that was like -- So 1920. Can you believe that?

Q: Forehead high, eyes black. Look at that.

A: It says there 5'6". I think he was taller. I don't remember my father being -- Like, I'm 5'10" -- Poppy wasn't 5'6". He was taller than 5'6". He was not like this.

Q: I'm 5'5 ½", and with these shoes on I'm 5'6". Because you're tall.

AA: We used to be taller, but as you get older, you shrink. At least that's what my mother kept telling me. It's true.

Q: This is quite something.

A: This is my grandfather.

Q: Your grandfather. So he was the one born in Corsica.

A: Yes. My grandfather. November 15th, 1894. Now you see this? She was pregnant with my father then, my grandmother. This is my Aunt Consuelo. She's dead quite a few years. But my father was born December 25th, 1894.

Q: Christmas day. Oh. It was a little more than a month --

A: [Translating inscription] "To our dear in-laws: We're proud to give you our humble photograph, so you can keep it as a remembrance. Your in-laws [?] --

Q: That was her nickname? Wow. Look at that. So they sent this through the mail to them? A postcard.

A: A postcard, right?

Q: Amazing, really. And they had this done in Puerto Rico, and sent it here, to the States?

A: No, no, they sent it to one of the in-laws -- I don't know to whom; I don't know how that wound up here. We found it a few years ago.

Q: You're lucky to have these.

A: But that's so faded, you can't do anything about that.

Q: I don't know. Bob would know, Bob Foster. He's so good with -- He knows a lot about cameras and photography.

A: This was my father later on in years, later on, and my Mom.

Q: She's beautiful.

A: She was a nice lady.

Q: She looks very petite.

A: My mother was short.

Q: And slender.

A: She was short. She got a little heavier when she was older. I thought there was a picture -- There might have been a picture of her later on, with me. That was me, and this is (it doesn't have the date], this is early '50s. That's my sister, Socorro, my brother, Edwin, and me. Our birthdays are in April, both my sister and I. This is me and -- They put "Junior," because I have the same name as [?] --

Q: Oh, look at you.

A: I know. With the long hair. Like a little girl.

Q: They did that. My father's pictures, when he was little -- the little, short dress, and the long hair. I never understood that.

A: This is my father, this is in Cuba.

Q: Look at that hat.

A: This is a cousin of his. This was in Cuba. These people were very military. And this is a picture from Cuba. Amalia, this girl here, was his goddaughter. I never met this woman. This was all in Cuba. These are old, old. We found these -- And this is later on in life. My father is there.

Q: Still before he moved here?

A: Oh, yes. This is in Puerto Rico. I've forgotten why he had -- These are all old, old photographs. Oh, this is me. This is 1952, I think. No, I don't have the names. I thought they were there. I won an

art contest. I won first prize. They're giving me the medal, and $25.00. I never saw the money. My mother kept it. That's it. I wish I had that medal. I don't know what happened to it. I'll always remember Harriet "Moses," and Rosalyn Something-or-Other, and these were like two politicians --

Q: Oh, they weren't your teachers?

A: No, this was in City Hall.

Q: Oh. So you were always destined for City Hall, right?

A: And I did that drawing --

Q: It's nice.

A: It's a little boy helping an old lady across the street. I remember there's a cap there, someplace, sitting somewhere on the sidewalk there --

Q: You need a magnifier. And a car.

A: And a policeman. Yes. A traffic policeman.

Q: That's nice.

A: I won first prize. This was drawn, these were paste-ons.

Q: I see. No wonder you won. You cheated.

So even when I moved to town. I moved to town in 1970 --

A: This was me in the service.

Q: Oh. Wow. It looks like you. You look like a boy. You look so young.

A: I was seventeen years old. I enlisted at seventeen, and looked like I was twelve. Isn't that weird?

Q: Did you go overseas?

A: No. This was after Korea and before Vietnam. This is 1956. This is before Vietnam and after Korea. This is '56. A long time ago.

Q: [Tape interruption] -- families I knew lived in the Bronx, or in Manhattan. Well, I was always under the impression that Hoboken didn't have a large Puerto Rican community.

A: But Hoboken was the mecca for Puerto Ricans in New Jersey. In New Jersey.

Q: So if you were going to move to New Jersey, you moved to Hoboken.

A: Yes, and when we moved here, like I said, we were one of the first families here in Hoboken, as a whole. I know we were the second family here, like I said before, but there were other Puerto Ricans who settled in in different parts, most notably Fifth & Monroe. I always remembered that as being Puerto Rican. And word of mouth. Just by word of mouth; people telling their relatives and their families back there that this was a nice place. To the extent that in 1955 there was a huge migration of people from Puerto Rico to here. That was the biggest year, historically. I think if anybody looks back at the migration of Puerto

Ricans, that was the biggest year -- 1955. At one point the Puerto Ricans numbered, here, close to one-fourth of the population of Hoboken.

Q: And when you moved here, what was the ethnic makeup of the town?

A: The ethnic makeup of the town at that time -- I think we were at the tail-end of the German and Irish, so when we moved here, actually, the mayor, I think, was probably the first Italian mayor here. His name was Fred de Scapio. He may be one of the guys in that photo, I'm not sure. I don't know who they were. But Mayor de Scapio was the mayor then. Then we had a mayor by the name of John Grogan. After that came "de Pascal." But at that time this area here, Fourth & Willow, there were more German and Irish people than there were Italians. The families were concentrated downtown; in what they called "downtown."

Q: And over --

A: Well, that's the area -- See, traditionally, Hoboken "downtown," even if you live on Second & Washington, that's not downtown. Downtown is like west of Clinton, basically. Anything west of Clinton they call downtown. That's where more Italian people lived. I

remember the rivalry between the Italians [?] -- and the Puerto Ricans back then. At first, when we came here to Fourth & Willow -- I'm not talking about our neighborhood -- I think they saw us as "cute." We were not black. We spoke a different language. And, frankly, we were not a threat to employment or to housing at that time. I've always used that, I think, as an example of how ghettos are created. Because I think ghettos are created through prejudice or through ignorance or resentment of a certain ethnic group moving into a neighborhood. What happens is, the people who are in place start moving out. They start moving out. And that saying, "There goes the neighborhood -- ?" So they do that, for whatever reason, and as one Irish or German or Italian family moves out, a Puerto Rican family would move in, and then it just ballooned -- to the extent that, by the late '50s or even the mid-'50s -- I'm going to say between 1949 and 1955, this block was totally Puerto Rican. Totally. I want to say every single apartment there, by the mid-'50s, was probably occupied by a Puerto Rican family. And most of those people had paying work at the Tootsie Roll company. So at 7:00 in the evening, when they had their break -- their lunch break -- They had three shifts, of Tootsie Rolls. That was a big, big company. It employed a lot of people. A lot of people. And I'll always remember, at 7:00 -- We didn't see them during the day because we were working, but at 7:00, when they came out for their meal, you would see all these uniforms walking through here, a couple blocks away, they'd come to eat. Very rarely did anybody bring

lunch over there -- even though you did see workers sitting on the fire escapes or outside on the sidewalk, eating. But most people came home to eat. Then you would see them march -- I remember they had like grey uniforms, very light, regular overhauls with the caps.

Q: Men and women?

A: Oh, men and women. Yes. Men and women. In a lot of cases the husband and wife both worked, if they had an adult to take care of the children within the house. At that time there wasn't too much babysitting.

Q: It was your aunt or your grandmother.

A: Exactly. Or somebody of your confidence. My mother has -- or had -- a lot of adopted grandchildren, in that sense. When my mother passed away, you wouldn't believe the people who showed up to see her.

Q: Because she had raised them.

A: She had raised them. These are kids who see me as a brother or an uncle.

Q: Whom you really grew up with.

A: And during those days it was really a family-oriented neighborhood.

Q: Well, and living in that building, it must have been just like living in a big town, or a community that was --

A: Exactly. Exactly.

Q: Most people spoke Spanish at home --

A: In the summer people were very -- Hispanic people in general are very gregarious. They like to socialize and talk. Back then the customs of the island were more vibrant and more prevalent at that moment than they are now. You were talking about first-generation people, coming over, who still have these memories and still share. Now, when you use the term Puerto Rican, and you apply it to the general public here, a lot of people really -- They have the pride and the pride is shown at the --

Q: -- parades.

A: -- parades and the festivals and stuff. But on a day-to-day basis, they're more American. They've become more assimilated. They've lost a lot of their customs. Back then those customs were, as I say, vibrant. So when people got together and there were feasts, there was that island music and that island flavor, you didn't think about ordering pizza, or about having catering, or having rap music. You know what I'm saying? It was different.

Those are good memories for me. Good memories for me.

Q: I'm sure. People probably played instruments?

A: Oh, yes. Sure. And at the time the city was different. You didn't have the traffic congestion problems that we have now. So every Thursday, on Willow Avenue here, between 12th and 11th, would be shut down, and was used --

Q: -- as a play area.

A: -- as a play area, so kids could roller skate. At that time you didn't have that angle parking, like you have today. If you saw, in the '50s, if you saw six or eight cars parked in a block, it was a lot.

Q: It was a lot, and you thought somebody was having a party.

A: Yes. It was a lot.

Q: So you basically went across the street and went to the Wallace School --

A: I went to the Wallace School, the old Wallace School, for fifth grade. I had great teachers. I have nothing but the best memories of it. I remember them all. I remember my English teacher, Marie O'Brien, who was a beautiful inspiration to me. Miss Cudahy, who was the math teacher. Back then we didn't call it math; we called it arithmetic. It wasn't called mathematics, it was called arithmetic. My history teacher, Miss Heath -- a tough old lady, but beautiful. My geography teacher, Miss Dreeson, a beautiful lady, too. My literature and spelling teacher, Mr. Hydell, and the gym teacher was Tom Shirley. Those were the people. Really good.

Q: Did you feel any sort of prejudice about your nationality? None of those teachers were Latin.

A: No, none of the teachers were Latin, but those teachers were great. Back then, like I say, at the beginning, we were seen as "cute," in that sense. But as the composition of the area began to change, ethnically, then you would hear certain remarks like -- I'll always remember this woman whom I used to do errands for. Ella "Klantz." Nice lady. But she always made the remark -- She used to say, "Tommy, what's wrong with these Puerto Ricans?'

Q: What's wrong with these people?"

A: Yeah. "What's wrong with this people?" Or whatever it was. "Not *your* family."

Q: You're different.

A: Yes. And I used to say, "Why is she saying this?" But to me it wasn't anything -- The racial thing never entered. Because when you're young, when you're a kid, you don't think about that. In fact, there was a point in my life where I really felt that I truly belonged here. By the way, that changed later on. Later on I ran into some experiences that affected my way of thinking. I saw it in the service, and I saw it after I came out of the service, here. But back then I don't remember -- I remember the clashes between Italians -- I'm going to say

this, because it's what I feel: Italians are the people who more resemble Hispanics in so many ways. Because Italian people traditionally have something about their family -- the place for the mother; the father; our religion [Roman Catholic]; our language. Our language is so similar. We have those traditions -- deep family traditions. We'll kill for our family. But here in Hoboken, the Italians were the most prejudiced against the Hispanics. I don't know why. I never got that., and it's probably there. Maybe the Italians were more honest about it --

Q: More up front.

A: More open, more up front about it. But I never got it so much from the Irish or German people. There were a few Jewish people, but more from Italians, to the extent that the clashes here were among youth; among Puerto Rican and Italian kids.

Q: And real fighting? Gang kind of stuff?

A: Real fighting, yes. If you went to areas like Fifth & Monroe, back then, before the neighborhood became -- It was like you were looking for trouble.

Q: Right. You were in their territory.

A: Because you would get beat up. I got into many fights up here. We had a pool, there was a swimming pool, right here on Washington Park, right up the hill. I'll tell you exactly where the pool is. When you go up "Peasant Plank" road, going toward Union City, on the left there's always like a hotdog cart there, and there's like an open area there? That's where the pool was. It was Washington. We used to call it the North Street pool, and we used to go up there, and we used to get into -- I got beat up a lot of times. These were kid things. We got into so many fights. But you didn't think of that as a racial thing, even though the slurs were there -- "You're a spic," or the Puerto Rican kids calling the other ones "guineas." It wasn't anything so -- I didn't see it as something malicious or racial.. I saw malicious, racial prejudice later on in life, when I had a little more capacity --

Q: When you were a little more savvy about the whole thing.

A: Exactly. I went to Wallace, graduated from the eighth grade, and went to Demarest High School, after I graduated. Demarest was a nice school, too. I never graduated from Demarest. I quit school in tenth grade to go into the service, to help out with my family; to help my family out. Things were tough then. By that time we had a

fourth child, not who lives in this house now -- Carmen, who is my cousin on my mother's side. Her mother and father had died in Puerto Rico in the mid-'50s. There were six kids, and what the family did was, the family took the kids in. We wound up with Carmen, my sister, Carmen. It's weird, because to this day she's my sister, but her brothers and sisters are my cousins! You know what I'm saying? Beautiful. She works for Dr. "De Amurti" here. Nice woman, and [?] -- brother Angel. We own the house jointly.

Q: All together. Yes.

A: So things were tough. I went into the service in 1956, came out in '59, and I met Margie in 1960.

Q: How did you meet?

A: How did we meet? I don't know. How did we meet, Margie?

AA: You know.

A: I had a friend of mine who was getting married, in Brooklyn, to a girl who was a friend of her sister. Now we didn't know

each other. This was right around Halloween. I always remember the date. You don't remember but I remember. November 29, 1960. I'm sorry. October 29, 1960, right around Halloween. I was going to go, with a few friends of mine, to a costume party here in Hoboken, at the Spanish American Catholic Center. We had a Catholic Center on Washington Street, and we were going to go there. But my mother had a gift -- My mother knew his mother. In fact, my friend's sister had been my girlfriend. She had a gift for him, and I wound up being forced to go to Brooklyn. I had never been to that area -- I had been to New York and Brooklyn but I had never been to East New York, where she was from -- to his apartment in the projects. Right? That's where the reception --

AA: It was different, then.

A: Yes. It was a family thing, in the apartment. I went there. I dragged a couple of friends of mine who were going to go to the party with me. I said, "We'll go there. We'll drop this off, come back, and go to the party." Well, we got there and we never made it back, because there were so many girls. And that's where I met Margie.

Q: That was the beginning of the end.

A: Yes. Margie was still in high school. Margie's four years younger than me. She was still in high school.

Q: She had a ways to go.

A: Right. So the deal was, "You cannot have a boyfriend until you finish high school." My father had that with my sisters. Very strict. If I tell you what you had to go through to ask for somebody's hand, in the Puerto Rican culture back then -- Now that's all down the drain. Now my daughters come in, "Pa, this is Danny." "How are you. Hey, Tom. How're you doin'?" And they call me Tom. I couldn't hear myself calling her father by his first name. It was always Don. Don Vicente, right? I would never to her father, "Hey, Vicente. Como esta?" No, no, no. I could tell you what I went through.

Q: Yes. You went through a lot of them.

A: Like I say, she was in high school. We went for about a period of a year and a half, before she graduated, before I was able to talk to the father. I saw her on the sneak.

Q: Oh, you did.

A: Yes. Her mother knew about it. Mothers are traditionally the buffers. Her father was a guy I was definitely afraid of.

Q: You weren't going to tangle with him.

A: Oh, no. You have that respect, and you're actually scared of them. You see this guy as somebody who's tough --

Q: Oh, my grandfather -- Let me tell you. He was a tough old --

SIDE TWO

Q: -- experience of them. I grew up with them and they were extremely prejudiced, and I don't know why. I've never really been able to figure that out. But it's part of -- I don't know if it's part of the Italians-in-Italy culture -- And I don't even know if it's part of Italians who went to California. I don't know. Italians here -- Unbelievably bigoted and prejudiced.

A: I agree with you. I don't know if it's true -- I know in Hoboken there's a certain breed of people, and I see that with Puerto Ricans here, too. I don't know whether the fight for survival or whatever,

or the struggle -- the power struggle -- but it does change people.

Q: It does. And I think the Italian people who stayed in Hoboken and Jersey City were really like street fighters. They were tough. They didn't value education all that much. They had a very self-protective --

A: Yes. Exactly. I guess they become very defensive, and want to protect what's there, tooth and nail.

Q: I don't really know why that is, but that's been my experience.

A: Well, in 1962 I finally got to talk to Margie's father. I remember taking the train -- She lived in Brooklyn, and it was twenty-three stops. I used to do that trip every weekend, when we were seeing each other on the sneak, once a week. Later on, when I was able to go to her house (it was actually Saturdays and Sundays when I used to go out there, but] it was twenty-three stops on the train. She lived in the projects in Brooklyn, in East New York -- tough neighborhood; really tough neighborhood -- and I used to go there. But the night I went there, she had told the father --

Q: Oh, she had. You had prepped him?

A: -- that somebody was coming to talk to him.

Q: He had never met you?

A: No.

Q: He had never laid eyes on you.

A: No. He had never laid eyes on me. She's the youngest of four sisters, four girls, and at the time two sisters were married, one sister had a boyfriend who had the "in"; he had already gone there, and he had the right to visit. The rule was that, even though he had the "in," they could never go out by themselves, with the boyfriend, even though the boyfriend was known. You needed a chaperone, always. Always. So I used to go there and wait downstairs, previous to my meeting her father. Wait downstairs, in the cold, in the heat. I'm looking there at the seventh floor. I'm here. You've got the elevator subway, I'm standing there. Finally it would come down, and we would go to the movies, a group of us. I would come back, say goodbye, get on the train, and come back home, here. I did that for a while.

So, finally the day came when I had to meet him. It was on a Saturday. I went there, I was in the hallway -- scared -- I finally knocked on the door, Margie opened the door, she brought me inside. Her father was there (God bless him], her mother was there [God bless her], her aunt -- Carmen was there [Spanish exchange] Dona "Alla" --

AA: Well, he was scared.

A: Well, no, I have a good memory. She knows I remember things. Dona "Alla," her mother. Don Vicente. "Segunda" was there. "Rica" was there, con Susi. Susi was -- Was "Vitungo?" No. "Vitungo" wasn't born yet, right? But Carmen was there, "Atala" -- a whole bunch of people there -- and I remember her father sitting in the little kitchen there, at the table, and he had a couple shots of rum [Spanish] -- He prepared himself for me. I remember Margie introducing me, and then just leaving.

Q: Leaving. Right. Couldn't face him.

A: The only one who wasn't there when I talked to him was -- And he grilled me.

Q: What did he ask you?

A: He asked me, "Who are you? What are you doing here?" I had to say, "Well, I know your daughter and I would like permission to know her better, and to know your family."

"To what end, do you want to know my family?"

Q: To what end!

A: "Well, you know, perhaps in the future we could -- "

"Perhaps could be never," he said.

Q: You had to state your intention to marry her, at that time?

A: Oh, yes. He almost had me set the date, basically. That was the only thing that was missing.

"Who's your family? I want to meet your family?"

All I wanted was permission to go up there? To visit.. I didn't want to stand in the cold no more. So he sat there, listened to me and all that. He told me he wanted to meet my family. I had to go up there, I think maybe not the week after but the following week, I brought my mother and father up there, and my sister, Socco. [Spanish]

Q: I guess everyone accepted the same thing. So your parents were prepared for this.

A: Of course. That's the way things were then.

Q: Yes. Right. That's the way it was. Your father had to do the same thing.

A: Then right after -- It was such a relief to be able to sit there. "Oh, I'm here. I can't believe it. Look at this."

AA: My mother used to [?] --

A: But listen to this. It's not that everything was cool, then. Like I said, even though I had the permission, the rule was "you're never alone with your intended. Never." Never at all. So I used to go there Saturdays, and we used to go to the movies. Or maybe dancing. We did a lot of dancing. We used to go to clubs in New York with her sister, who was married, or the other sister. Always with chaperones. We would go to the Broadway Casino. [?] -- we went there a lot, where they had live bands and dancing and all that. Sundays, we may go to movies in the afternoon -- maybe -- or we just hung out in the house there. Radio City.

We used to go to the movies a lot. But Sunday evening -- A typical Sunday evening would find us sitting on the couch -- I'm sitting there, she's sitting there -- and her mother and father would be there, in a rocking chair, rocking, rocking. And what are we watching? We're watching the circus. Then after the circus, what comes? Ed Sullivan. The Ed Sullivan show. My cue was the moment that the credits came on for the Ed Sullivan show, at 9:00, I had to get up, say goodnight and all that.

Now in the meantime, we're there; never had a moment alone; couldn't kiss, nothing. So what did we do? So maybe once a month I used to say, "I'll see you tomorrow morning." And I used to travel out there in the morning -- At the time I was working in New York for a typewriter company, on Canal Street, and Margie, she had graduated, and she was working for the Book-of-the-Month Club, on Spring Street, by Prince Street.

Q: I know the neighborhood, yes.

A: So Margie used to work for the Book-of-the-Month Club. So I'd say, "I'll see you tomorrow." So I used to go down there, by the train, wait at the train station. We would come into Manhattan together. She would call my job and say she was my sister or something and that I was sick. And I would call --

Q: -- her job.

A: -- and we would go to the park, or the movies, or something. And that's because we were not aloud -- We still had to sneak around. And even when we were looking for an apartment, when we set the date for the marriage and everything, we never saw an apartment by ourselves. Her father was always with us. I remember we saw an apartment on Nostrand Avenue, around there, and your father said, "No, this is too far."

Q: For him!

A: "This is too far for you." So we wound up moving -- The first apartment was maybe about -- Astoria, Rockaway -- How many stops away? Six stops away.

Q; From them.

A: Yes. Six subway stops away.

Q: So you lived in Brooklyn.

A: Yes. We lived on Lincoln Place, between Classen and Franklin, right off Eastern Parkway. Do you know where the Brooklyn Museum is? Right there. In front of Grand Army Plaza. Right there, right near the entrance -- There's an entrance to the Botanical Gardens there, too. Nice neighborhood. It went down the drain at one point --

Q: -- and now it's back.

A: When we moved there there were a lot of Jewish people.

AA: It was a nice apartment.

A: Yes, it was. Five-forty-one Lincoln Place. I'll always remember. That was our first apartment.

Q: Well, the buildings there are so much bigger, right? So you get larger apartments with more windows?

A: Well, it's a different type of structure. Here, you get a lot of railroad flats. Over there you have box rooms, so you do have windows. The long hallway, and you have marble in -- In the actual,

exterior hallway, you have marble. You had an interior hallway toward the foyer. It was really nice.

Then I got laid off from work. Things were rough, then, and we wound up moving back to Hoboken.

Q: In with your family?

A: We moved in with my family for a while, yes. With my Mom. On Ninth & Garden.

Then I got a job here. I became a billing clerk for a garment company right here on Park Avenue & Thirteenth, which doesn't exist anymore. Then after that I got a job with Bali Bra, a big company here in Jersey City. I was a shipping clerk for them.

Q: What year are we in, now?

A: We're already in -- We moved back to Hoboken in 1964. In '64 my daughter was born, and in '65 my son was born. We had two, one after the other. So Vicky just turned thirty-seven, and Tommy turned thirty-six. We moved back to Hoboken, and in 1965 it was a big, rude awakening for me, when I was looking for an apartment to move in. When I say "rude awakening," that's when I really became conscious of the prejudice -- became witness to personal incidents of prejudice.

Q: Where it was directed toward you and your family.

A: Toward me, yes. At that time we were living at 1312 Bloomfield. It was a one-bedroom apartment owned by a Jewish man. His name was also Greenberg, like my father's old boss. A good man. We lived there, in a one-bedroom apartment. Applied Housing has that building, now, by the way. When Tommy was born the apartment was just too small for us. All we had was one bedroom to begin with, and Vicky, my oldest daughter was there in her crib. But it would have been too much with two children, so we started looking around. That's when prejudice began to hit home; when we were looking for an apartment. We got turned down for so many reasons. I remember going to Washington Street with Margie. There's a candy store on Sixth & Washington (it's still there now[called Davis Candy Store, and at that time it was owned by a guy by the name of Davis. It kept the name, but it's no longer owned -- I think some Indian people own that candy store, now. I remember going into Davis's to make a phone call, after I saw an ad in the *Jersey Journal Observer*, and there was an ad that said, "Apartments for Rent; two-three bedrooms; convenient -- " [I'll always remember that' -- "to all buses. Heat included." And the rent wasn't bad. The rent was maybe $80. Something like that. That's all it was. I remember calling the number that was there, and the apartments actually were on Twelfth &

Washington, between Twelfth and Thirteenth. Applied Housing owns that whole block there now; what they called the "Yellow Flats." I called the number, and the guy answered the phone. His last name was Alberti; I'll always remember. He answers the phone. He says, "How can I help you?" I said, "I'm calling about the ad in the paper."

"What's your name?"

I said, "Olivieri."

So he says, "Are you related to the Olivieris -- "

Remember that boy I mentioned, Joe? Their father and uncle owned the pool parlor on 14th Street, between Washington and Hudson, across from that [?] -- United Bank, right in the middle of the block. I don't know the name of the bar. There's a bar there, right by the post office. They owned the pool parlor there, and that was the place that all the people from the docks, when Bethlehem was there -- They used to come in there to eat sandwiches, because he had sandwiches. You can play pool in there. So he says to me, "Are you related to the Olivieris on 14th Street?" I said, "No, I'm not related, but I know Gus, and I know Nick, I know Tony and Joe and Peter." I knew the whole family. I rattled them off. I said, "They're my friends." So he says to me, "Mr. Olivier -- " This was on the phone. I was twenty-six years old. Twenty-six years old. He says to me, "Mr. Olivier, I don't have anything right now, but I'll keep you in mind. If anything comes up, I'll let you know. *Wait a minute.*"

"Wait a minute," he whispers into the phone. He says, "*Wait a minute.*" So I stayed on the phone. I don't know what's going on. He comes back on the phone, and he says to me, "Mr. Olivieri, I've got a beautiful apartment for you. You're going to love it. It's going to be nice for you and your family." Because I told him I had two children. He says, "I'm sorry I couldn't say anything before, but I had some Puerto Ricans in the office, and you know how it is." Would you believe that? You know what happened to me, Alyssa? The hairs --

Q: I couldn't imagine what you were going to say.

A: That's what he said. [?] -- We're on Washington Street. I called from there.

Q: So what happened? So what did you do?

A: So, yes, the other one was something else. So my hairs are going like this -- It really gave me chills. It gave me chills. I still get chills, to this day. But all I said to him was -- I was shocked. I said, "I know how it is." But what came into my head was, "I've got to see this guy." That's what came -- "I've got to know who this is."

I said, "I know how it is. When can I see the apartment?" So we made an appointment for the next day. This was on a

Saturday. The next day -- Sunday -- at 2:00, I put on a suit I had, I combed my hair to the side, I went up there and rang his bell. He lived at 59 Thirteenth Street, right across from the Y (that's all Applied Housing, too]. I saw his name, I rang the bell, and he rang back down.

Now I'm going up the stairs. Now the stairs are those that are broken into landings -- like you go half a landing, then you have to go another half floor, and he lived like on the third floor. When I got to the landing just before he was standing right there, and to me he was an old man. I was twenty-six, he was probably in his fifties, but to me he looked so old. He was younger than what I am now --

Q: It's all about your perspective, right?

A: Right. To me he looked like an old guy.

Q: He says to me, "Did you ring my bell?" I said yes.

"Are you Mr. Olivier?"

I said, "Yes, I'm Olivieri." And his face fell. He knew right away. I walked right up to him, up the stairs, and I said, "Listen, you dirty bastard pig." I said a whole bunch of stuff. I said, "I don't want your apartment. I just wanted to see who the hell you were. I'm going to report you," and I left him standing there. He said nothing. He said nothing. To me, like I said, he was an old man. I really felt like lashing

out at him.

So I walk out of there -- At that time, that was the beginning of Civil Rights, and there was an agency in Jersey City called "Can Do" (just like that; "Can Do") that dealt with civil rights problems with blacks. At that time I was working at Bali Bra, and a kid I worked with -- I told him what happened, and he said, "You shouldn't put up with that, you should go -- " So he took me there. I forget where it was. As I remember, it was near Garfield Avenue, where [?] -- State Park is. That area there. I remember going out there and explaining everything. He sounded very interested, but what he did was, he put me in touch with a reporter from the *Jersey Journal*, for a story. I spoke to the reporter and he wasn't even interested. He said, "Look, it's your word against his. And that's it. It's not going to stand up." [Interruption]

So he wasn't interested, and that thing died out there. But, during that period of time when I was looking for an apartment, I had a series of run-ins with people concerning apartments, people who were blatantly prejudiced, and some who tried to be more subtle about it, but you could see the reason why I wasn't getting the apartments. I really took offense to that, because I had lived here all those years already; I felt myself a part of this community --

Q: You money was as good as anybody else's, as they say. Right?

A: Yes. And to me it was something really alien. I never thought I would encounter stuff like that.

Another time, right around that time, there was a real estate agency. I don't remember what they charged then. I don't remember them charging a month's fee. Frankly, I don't know what the fee would have been if I had gotten the apartment, but there was a real estate agency across from City Hall that was called McQueen Realty, and I went there to ask them to help me find an apartment. They sent me to an apartment here on Eleventh & Hudson. I think the house was, maybe, 1110-1112 Hudson, one of the second or third houses on that block, on this side, across from Maxwell House. I remember going there. I went to McQueen and they gave me a sheet of paper, "Show Mr. Olivieri the apartment." To the super of the building. I rang the bell, and they buzzed me in. Now the super's apartment was on the first floor, on the left. I walk to the rear of the hallway and a lady comes out, a blonde lady (I don't know what nationality she was]. She said, "Yes?" and I said, "They sent me here for the apartment, to show me the apartment." And she says to me, "They sent *you*?" Like that. "They sent *you*?" I said, "Yes, they sent me." I got pissed right away. I said, "Yes, they sent me. Are you the super?" She said, "My sister." I said, "Well, get her out here. I want to talk to her." So her sister comes out, I showed her the -- She says, "Okay, wait a minute." She goes inside, and she gets the keys.

The apartment was on the fourth floor. We're walking up the hallway. All the way up: "I don't want any -- You got children?"

"Yes."

"I don't want any children running in the hallways here." One of those. Tommy was newborn and Vicky was like one year old, right? This was in '65. Tommy was just newborn. I said, "My kids are -- " and she says --

Q: "I don't want any noise."

A: "I don't want any wild parties."

We didn't even have a record player! We didn't. We had a radio. I said, "We're not going to have any wild parties." I think I told her, "We don't even have a record player." Then, we were in the apartment and she says, "And another thing. I don't want more than one family living here." And I said something about -- I think back then it was racist for me to say it -- I said, "Wait a minute, lady. You're mistaking me. I'm not a gypsy. I'm Puerto Rican." I remember telling her that. Because back then Hoboken had gypsies.

Q: Really.

A: Yes. We had gypsies here. Yes. I remember gypsies on 14th Street, and everybody was leery of them. They were doing fortune telling and stuff like that --

Q: They were?

A: Yes.

Q: Really.

A: I'll always remember -- You know the buildings here, across from where "Holster's" was?

Q: Yes.

A: Right there. The buildings from 203 14th to 213 14th.

Q: The ones that "Patooie" owns.

A: Yes. The ones of "Patooie" -- Well, right there, there were storefronts in all those buildings, on the bottom floors, and in one of those storefronts, at one point, there was a gypsy family there. And

there were other families around Hoboken. So the word was, "A whole bunch of people live there." So I said that to her. Anyway, I liked the apartment. It was a fourth-floor railroad flat, windows -- I liked it. I said, "I like the apartment. I'd like for my wife to see it. When can she see it?" So she says, "Well, tomorrow morning, at this time." So I came home, I told Margie, and the next day I'm at work and Margie calls me. I went to work, she calls me, crying, that the woman refused to show her the apartment. "What?"

So I left. I told Meyer, "Remember? I called him the other day." I was a shipping clerk and my supervisor's name was Meyer "Starsky." As a mater of fact he still lives in Edison, and I called him the other day. "Meyer, I finally retired." I hadn't talked to him in twenty years. I said, "Meyer, I've got an emergency at home. I've got to leave."

"What happened?"

"I'll be back in a little while."

I took the #5 bus, I went to the real estate agency, and I told them off. I didn't go up there because I felt I could have killed that woman. I said, "How dare you send people to places where they're going to be treated like that?"

Anyway. That was the end of that apartment. That was the end. You know the excuse they gave her?

Q: They rented it already.

A: No. The excuse they gave Margie was that it was too high a floor to walk up with two children.

Q: As if you can't make that decision yourself.

A: Eleven-ten Hudson, I think it was. Eleventh & Hudson.

AA: That's when they saw me. Is that the one you're talking about?

A: No, no. That's another story. That's a total story, again.

Q: Weren't there any buildings owned by Latin families here?

A: No, not at that time. No, I don't think so. Or, wait a minute. There was. Ray Castillo, who was the first Puerto Rican policeman here in Hoboken (he lives out in Toms River now], he owned a house back here, on Grant, right behind the "curling" club, that area

there, where there was all the development there. There was a one-family house there. They went there. I remember that.

Q: Because by the time I moved to town there were a lot of houses in town -- Not necessarily the big apartment buildings, but two- and three-family houses, owned by --

A: Yes. When did you move here?

Q: Seventy-eight.

A: By then, yes. But in the '60s, the mid-'60s, no, there weren't.

So I finally got an apartment, by the way, but not before going through stuff like that. I'll always remember 940 Willow, right here, right down, a couple of blocks away, next to where Mohica lived, Mohica [?] -- In fact, it's Mohica's house -- 940 -- because 942 is the corning building. I remember seeing a sign at that building, then, that said, "Apartment for Rent." I rang the bell, a woman came out, and she says, "Yes?" An Italian woman, with a heavy accent. I said, "I'd like to see the apartment." She says to me, "The boss is not here now." The "boss."

Q: Was this her husband?

A: I don't know. I said, "When will he be back?"

"Oh, he's on vacation," she said to me. "On vacation." She's got the sign out, but "I can't show the apartment, because he's on vacation." So I took the sign -- The sign is dangling right by us. I said (because I knew what she was telling me], "Listen, why don't you put the sign in, so people don't make the same mistake?"

"Oh, thank you."

So she goes in. I come back. I pass by there an hour later, the sign is out again. You know what I did? I took it, and I took it home. I just got so pissed.

Q: Now what about other Puerto Rican families? Were they experiencing similar things at the time? Did you feel like there was a growing sense of resentment and anger in general?

A: Yes. Certainly. Certainly. What I didn't want to fall into was a situation where a building -- I saw the deterioration that was happening here. I had grown up on this block. By the time I got married my mother had moved away from here, and the deterioration here for a while, in this block, was blamed on the residents. But the truth of the matter was, it was a combination of factors. When you have a building or

you have an area, and you rent to people without doing any background check, without really checking out the tenant who's coming in, you're going to have problems. And when you allow for the building to deteriorate, where violations exist but there is a need for people to rent an apartment, some people will go in there. Nothing is done, but people are willing to go in there because the rents are cheap. But then you may get a tenant who may not be a good tenant. So it's a combination of the landlord allowing the building to deteriorate, not doing a background check, so, of course the neighborhood is run down and everything is ultimately blamed on the resident. The landlord is also to blame. As a tenant advocate in later years, I saw that even more. To this day, three months ago, I saw that on Washington Street, in buildings there where the owner just basically let it go, then blames the tenants. Then wants to have it both ways; wants to have huge rent increases, but doesn't want to do anything about the building. Then, when he's called to do something about it, he always puts the blame on the tenant.

So, over the years, you get that experience. Back then I knew enough that I didn't want to move into a neighborhood where the landlord wasn't going to take care of a building. Ultimately, what happened was that when I did get an apartment -- [Interruption]

Q: That's for sure.

A: You ought to see her brother. Her brother's beautiful. Frankie. Two and a half years old. That's him there, when he was smaller. I don't have any pictures of him here. Give that to Margie. Frankie. We just have pictures of him.

AA: I don't know where they are. They're all over the house.

A: He's good, Frankie. His father's Italian.

Q: His father's Italian. I need glasses for everything now. Oh, he's adorable.

A: Which one is that?

Q: On the little horse.

A: He's learning how to talk, so he can talk up a storm now.

Q: He's cute. When is his birthday?

A: February 11th is his birthday.

Q: Very cute. He looks big.

A: A real loving kid. One day he only wants Papa.

Q: Oh, that's nice. You got any teeth in there?

AA: Not yet. Soon. Soon.

Q: Soon you'll be swimming, it'll be so hot. She is a good girl.

AA: She is. Very good.

A: She sleeps all night. She goes to sleep about 9:00, she sleeps all the way to 7:00, smiling. She's the best. She's not a complainer at all.

Q: You can tell. She just goes with the flow. Whatever's going on is fine with her. As long as she's near people who love her.

So, we've got Hoboken with a lot of prejudice in it, and a hard time finding an apartment.

AA: He did stay in Hoboken, because I didn't know that much prejudice was going on. I lived in Brooklyn.

A: Your father used to say that.

AA: I didn't even know what prejudice was, when I was growing up in Brooklyn, until I came to Hoboken.

Q: Hoboken is a very unusual -- It may be small, but it has a very distinct character. Maybe because it is small, people are always fighting it out here. I don't know. It just seems like there's a lot of tension.

A: Margie's father used to say, about politics -- Margie's father and mother moved here, in what? The '80s, right?

Q: You mean when they moved to Hoboken?

A: In the '80s, yes. They put in an application to Applied Housing at one point, at one point they were called, and they moved here. They both passed away while living here. Her father always used to say he never saw politics like the politics here.

AA: That's the truth.

A: Like the politics here; how dirty, and how vindictive people were --

Q: Small-minded.

A: Alyssa, if you saw the fliers that were put out at this time, at the projects. You don't know about this?

Q: You mean for this election?

A: You had to see it. You had to see it. The one side -- the side that lost -- put up these fliers (of course, anonymously] claiming racism; things like, "Ask David Roberts why he doesn't want you eating in East L.A." I saw those fliers yesterday. Yesterday. One of the women from the projects showed me one. They asked people from the projects -- kids from the projects -- to distribute them; $50 to put these fliers onto people's doors; to distribute them. She's black, this woman who spoke to me and showed me the flier. Her grandson was home from college, and he said, "Grandma, I'm going to get $50 for distributing these fliers, for this group." And she said, "Don't do it, because you don't know what's

going to be on those fliers." He said, "Well, I need the money." Well, she said he met the guy on Washington Street. The deal was, "Here's a bunch of fliers." I don't know what they gave him for them. "Distribute them, come back here, and when you come back we'll give you the $50." Then they would give him more.

Well, she says he came home, she said, "Where are the fliers?" and he said, "I threw them in the incinerator." She said, "What did they say?" but he would not tell her. He said, "I'm going back to get my money." He went back, got his money, and they gave him more fliers. He came back and dumped them in the incinerator. But, in her building, from the other people who were distributing them, she got one of them. It said things like that, really aimed at making a distinction between black and white, and between Hispanic and black. Because Reuben Ramos, saying that he was a racist, too: "Do you think he wants you working for him? He doesn't want any blacks working for him." And Carol Marsh, the lady who ran, said, "They've said I want to tear down the projects and build a parking lot there." Can you believe that? But they put stuff like that -- I said, "Who's going to believe stuff like that?" But they actually had her -- and David Roberts: "Ask him why he doesn't want *you* eating in -- "

Q: Well, wasn't there a lot of bad stuff that happened after the hurricane? Wasn't there a relief efforts going on with people, in

City Hall, and there was some -- Was there a fund raiser at one of the restaurants, or -- ? Wasn't there something really nasty then?

A: Well, sure. What happened was these people, they wanted to give the impression that they were so great to the Hispanic community. I was an Hispanic Affairs officer then, aside from being a tenant advocate. Anytime there's a disaster the community rallies. So City Hall jumped in on this, and they wanted to be a part of it. Now we organized a relief fund through the Puerto Rican Week Committee. One of the places we went to -- We were asked to go to East L.A. to a fund raiser that Dave Roberts had. I went there as a representative of the Puerto Rican Week Committee, and they really took exception to that, the City.

Q: Because it was at his restaurant?

A: Because it was in his restaurant. Right. It had nothing to do -- They did a fund raiser. They raised quite a bit of money, that they gave to us. Well, they did not want us to accept that money. They made a big, big thing -- If they didn't have their hands on it, if they didn't want to project -- take the credit for it --

Q: -- they didn't want to do it.

A: They didn't want to do it. Very unclassy.

Q: That's for sure.

A: Very unclassy people.

Yes, we did two relief efforts, one for Hurricane Hortense, and one for Georges. The one for Georges, the last one, I went to Puerto Rico for both of them. We didn't want to release the money to politicians in Puerto Rico, so we did it through a clergy coalition out there, a group called the Christian Ministry for Emergency Services. We hooked up with these people, and what we would do was, we would go into a town -- For Georges we brought $30,000 to Puerto Rico. It's not really a lot. It's kind of like a drop in the bucket, when you saw the devastation and the monies that were needed. But it's still a significant amount of money.

Q: Sure. For one town. That's a lot of money.

A: And for Hurricane Hortense, we had done something similar. It was a smaller amount. Basically, what we would do was we would go into a warehouse -- like the food warehouse on Clinton

Street, where they sell wholesale. We would buy rice, beans, coffee, powdered milk, Pampers, off --

Q: Or sugar or whatever, in bulk.

A: Yes. Some cleaning materials and stuff, and we'd spend, maybe, in one shot, $3,000. We would buy $3,000 worth of stuff. We had a van. We'd load up the van to the top. We would take all that stuff we had bought there to a particular town that had been affected. We would go into one of the churches in the town, unload everything, and just line it up. Then we would make grocery bags.

So that's what we were doing, never letting anything out of our sight. We were there, we bought it, we loaded it, we unloaded it, we made the bags up, and then we'd take those bags and maybe about $50 worth of stuff for each family, and we would go into the mountains or whatever --

Q: Oh. You would actually drive it there.

A: We'd actually drive it there. We would go to the shelters, where people were being sheltered. We would see to their particular needs, and we would give each one maybe $50-60 worth of stuff. It was really beautiful. I met so many -- I've got photographs like

you wouldn't believe. If you want to see pictures of people in situations like that, hundreds of photographs. Yes.

So the money was well dispersed. This last trip, the one with Hurricane Georges, they saddled me with Nellie "Molano" and Robert "Crestfall," the mayor's assistant.

Q: You mean they both went with you?

A: They both went with me. At first it was supposed to be Nellie "Molano," and I wouldn't have minded. But they added Robert "Crestfall." So it became a political -- They tried to make it -- I didn't participate in that. They wanted photo shoots and stuff. I didn't participate in any of that stuff. At one point the mayor showed up, down in Puerto Rico, and he wound up going to one of the shelters there, to do like a photo shoot. Again, I stayed away from that whole thing. Because I told them -- I said, "See, that's how you kill things. You're doing something -- You're taking away from the worth of this trip by doing that." I don't know what other word to use but "unclassy."

Q: Yes. It kind of makes it all seem dirty.

A: It makes it tacky. It makes it really tacky. It's a shame. It's a shame.

Q: Well, that's what politicians are best at. That's what they do.

A: It's funny you say that. I just saw today -- You know the "Wizard of Id and BC?" Well, in BC, one ant asked the other, "What is the difference between a kingdom and a democracy?" and the other one answers, "In a kingdom you only have one thief."

Q: Sometimes I think it might be better. Because they're all trying to scramble to the top here, and they're all, like, slitting each other's throats.

A: Yes, I'm not even thrilled with the council person here.

Q: Well, was that part of the election -- ?

A: Oh, no, no, it wasn't. He [?] --

Q: That's right. Well, I've never been thrilled with any of the politicians since I've been here. One or two, but --

A: There's an old joke that you've got to break the word down, the word "politics." "Poly," from the Greek for "many"; and "ticks," for little, bloodsucking parasites.

Q: That's good. I'll remember that.

Well, maybe we should stop now, so next time we could sort of take it from when it sounds like you first got your apartment, and starting getting into the political --

A: The social stuff.

Q: That would maybe be a good place to go.

A: We're going to be here until the twelfth.

Q: The twelfth of June.